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SELF-DECEPTION IN TWO OF DICKENS' NOVELS

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
OF MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1970





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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Self-Deception in Two of Dickens' Novels", submitted by Ruth F. Glancy in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



## ABSTRACT

Self-deception as a basic motivation in Dickens' characters can be seen to derive primarily from the need of the person to protect himself from self-knowledge. While the problem is important in the studies of growth from childhood, David Copperfield and Great Expectations, it is the basis of the characterization of Dombey. Everything in the novel is related to the working out of Dombey's struggle to repress his love for his daughter.

In Our Mutual Friend, where deception is a theme, organizing principle, and symbol of modern society, the realization of self-deception in the major protagonists, Bella Wilfer and Eugene Wrayburn, appears to be a solution to the problem of society's corrupting effects.

An inquiry into certain aspects of self-deception in other characters such as Miss Wade, Tattycoram, Edith, Carker and Bradley Headstone suggests some of Dickens' insights into the nature of reality and inherent goodness. The belief in distortion, caused by self-deception, can be seen to lead to perversion and madness. Other related themes such as isolation and egocentricity are examined in the light of their relationship to self-deception.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of isolation has become a major concern for Dickens' readers. J. Hillis Miller defines Dickens' main theme as "the search of the outcast for status and authentic identity."<sup>1</sup> Much has been written on the lack of communication between characters, each adopting his own language, colouring his own particular area of existence, and not relating to others. Dorothy Van Ghent regards the lack of communication between characters in Great Expectations as an indication of Dickens' philosophy: "Dickens' technique is an index of a vision of life that sees human separatedness as the ordinary condition, where speech is speech to nobody and where human encounter is mere collision."<sup>2</sup> V.S. Pritchett also sees isolation as Dickens' general vision of life. Of the characters he writes that their "distinguishing quality...is that they are solitaires. They are people caught living in a world of their own. They do not talk to one another; they talk to themselves...."<sup>3</sup> But to regard the idea of isolation as a theory from which Dickens derives a "technique" is perhaps to place a wrong emphasis on the novels. Dickens' concern is really with communication, and with the ways in which characters themselves voluntarily bring about their own isolation.

Ruth Vande Kieft has countered Van Ghent's argument by showing that language is not the only means of communication, and that for Dickens' characters the greatest communication is often non-verbal.<sup>4</sup> She cites as an example the situation of Wemmick's father, the Aged P.. Cut off from people by his deafness and from the world by the moat





around the house, he is still not isolated because he loves and is loved. Apart from the unquestionable understanding that exists between himself and Wemmick, the old man is reached through the use of rituals, nodding, and the daily rounds of tea. Similarly Joe and Pip reach an understanding through the silent game of eating their slices of bread before the fire, a game that is important to them simply because they share a secret of which Mrs. Joe has no knowledge.

Because the sympathetic characters have an immediate, and not necessarily verbal, bond, the problem of isolation can be seen as a situation caused by the characters, rather than a general vision of life that Dickens applies to them. Throughout the novels egocentricity, or self-consciousness, becomes a major concern. It is the theme of Martin Chuzzlewit, a major part of the characterization of Dombey and old Dorrit, and the basis of the studies of growth, David Copperfield and Great Expectations. It is central to many of the characters in Our Mutual Friend. The criminals and madmen, in particular Miss Wade, Bradley Headstone, and John Jasper, are motivated by egocentricity and become victims of it.

Egocentricity involves a total commitment to self, and thus an automatic isolation: the egoist, feeling complete in his own awareness of himself, has no need for others. Thus in Martin Chuzzlewit each person hides his true nature from the outside world by adopting a mask. As Sairey Gamp says, "...we never knows wot's hidden in each other's hearts; and if we had glass winders there, we'd need to keep the shetters up, some on us, I do assure you!"(29). Hillis Miller refers to the method used by some of the characters to let them avoid contact with others: they adopt a double self, and thus carry on a relationship



within themselves as though it were with another person.<sup>5</sup> Thus Nadgett sends letters to himself, not, like Toots in Dombey and Son, to try to avoid loneliness, but in order to stay isolated. Similarly Mrs. Gamp carries on conversations with an imaginary Mrs. Harris. The theme of Martin Chuzzlewit is selfishness, and perhaps a difference can be seen between the attitude of the merely selfish person and the egoist, the more developed character of the later novels. In Martin Chuzzlewit the need for isolation is self-initiated, but it is based on genuine desire rather than fear. The selfish person is sure of his identity, whereas the egoist sees other people as a threat, and isolation becomes a means of protection. Thus Dombey blames Florence for trying to humiliate him, Charley Hexam accuses Lizzie of selfishness in holding him back, and Miss Wade sees people's kindness to her as condescension.

As the characterization becomes more complicated, protection is needed to hide the real self, not only from others, but from the person himself. Thus self-deception becomes a major concern in the novels. It is through self-deception that the person isolates himself not only from others but also from his true nature.

Dombey and Son is the only novel in which self-deception is the major theme. Dombey consciously forces himself to deny his true nature because he has come to fear emotion. Because Florence threatens his isolation by her knowledge of his love for her, he makes himself believe that he hates her, and yet he never truly convinces himself. It is his self-knowledge that causes him to deny it. In David Copperfield and Great Expectations Dickens explores the theme of self-deception with less intensity. Being concerned with youth, the novels examine the growth of the hero from childish egocentricity to mature selflessness,



and the process involves the struggle against self-awareness that is a part of the child's conflict. Thus self-deception becomes a way for David and Pip to hide their own sense of guilt. Because both novels are in part autobiographical, it could be argued that in David Copperfield David is saved from a true knowledge of his deception because Dickens himself cannot yet accept it. In Great Expectations Pip comes to a complete understanding of his conscious self-deception. In Little Dorrit the problem of self-deception is examined in Tattycoram and Miss Wade. The relationship reveals the difference between the self-deceiver who has convinced herself that she knows her true situation, and the less violent person who has an understanding throughout of her deception. In Our Mutual Friend the complexities of the problem of deception reach their widest expression. In a sense the novel is a return to the format of Martin Chuzzlewit in that many characters are examined in a social context. Whereas Dombey and Son explores the personal reasons for self-deception in a few characters, Our Mutual Friend is concerned with social reasons for self-deception. Bella Wilfer and Eugene Wrayburn both deceive themselves because, like Dombey, they fear emotion, but also because society has led them to believe that a certain attitude is required of them. When the desire for money has become the total occupation of the whole society, each person believes that that is his goal, and denies his true nature in order to achieve it. Thus Mrs. Lamble acts against her conscience to acquire money. Bella becomes mercenary against her will, and Eugene makes himself believe that he could not marry a poor factory girl. The novel is also interesting for this study because the question of selfishness is examined in such characters as Charley Hexam and Bradley Headstone. In fact Headstone





is the successor to Miss Wade, nearer in self-awareness to the narrator of Dostoyevsky's Notes from Underground.

Like Mrs. Skewton the Veneerings accept as real what is totally false. Headstone, Charley and Fascination Fledgeby accept their self-deception by attributing their real nature to others. Only by understanding what is true in himself can each character see through the deception of society and escape his self-imposed isolation through love. Thus Mrs. Boffin can pretend to isolate herself from Boffin by becoming "fashionable" and dividing their halves of the room accordingly, but Mrs. Boffin recognizes her own reality and fashion has no real meaning for her. Dickens' final position is perhaps that the only reality is goodness: self-deception leads to a false, and therefore dangerous distortion of self-awareness.

## II

The growth towards self-awareness of Dickens' characters has usually been underestimated by critics. Barbara Hardy refers to the "change of heart" as a sudden reformation, brought about by an outside influence. "This chosen convention depends on the moral double or opposite. The hero is changed by seeing his situation or his moral defect enacted for him in external coincidence: by his twin, who forces a recognition of loathsome resemblance, or his opposite, who forces reluctant admiration and comparison."<sup>6</sup> And yet the change is not so much a change as an acceptance of what the character has really always known. Outside influences such as Boffin's mercenariness, Eugene's near murder and Dombey's bankruptcy are only a part of what has been a developing knowledge of self-deception. The characters move not outwardly so much as inwardly to an awareness of their true nature.





In Martin Chuzzlewit Dickens is concerned with the change from selfishness to selflessness through self-knowledge, but the development is not the gradual one of Bella, Eugene and Dombey. Martin is not aware from the beginning that his true nature is unselfish. Thus when Dickens makes the conversion he shows that Martin is only now questioning himself: "...he began to think, how was it that this man, who had had so few advantages, was so much better than he who had had so many? And attendance upon a sick bed, but especially the sick bed of one whom we have been accustomed to see in full activity and vigour, being a great breeder of reflection, he began to ask himself in what they differed"(33). As Mrs. Hardy has pointed out, Dickens says that the reflection lasts for some time, but for the reader it is a sudden enlightenment. Martin's realization is not the end to which the novel has been proceeding, as is the case in Dombey and Son. But his realization is not just "the discovery that his essential self is selfish"<sup>7</sup> but rather that his true nature is not selfish. "Martin's nature was a frank and generous one, but he had been bred up in his grandfather's house...Martin had unconsciously reasoned as a child, 'My guardian takes so much thought of himself, that unless I do the like by myself I shall be forgotten.' So he had grown selfish"(33). It is impossible for the deceiver to acknowledge his fault without realizing that he should be different, and it is his awareness of his potential for goodness that brings about the change. Self-awareness is always basically a knowledge of good. Thus Carker's enlightenment shows him a weak and misguided man, but one capable of asking forgiveness. Headstone never comes to a realization of his true nature and thus is aware only that he is tormenting himself, not that the torment is unnecessary. He does not see that others do not



disparage him for his upbringing and that it is his own sense of worthlessness that drives him to fear others. Thus Headstone's only escape is through suicide. For Dombey, Bella and Eugene, self-awareness shows them their capacity to love. Similarly Edith's self-awareness allows her to accept her true nature and resist final degradation.

David Copperfield, like Martin, comes to a realization of his guilt and true potential in what appears to be a sudden enlightenment. But in David's case the awareness is drawing nearer to true self-deception. Gwendolyn Needham explains that David's self-deception is largely unconscious: "David...reveals both his secret unhappiness and his present inability to analyse its true causes. This inability is suggestive of an unconscious refusal to face facts too painful to bear, an unconscious desire to preserve at all costs some golden remnants of his dream while acknowledging its imperfect round. He has not yet realized that every individual ultimately must supply himself the inner strength and purpose he needs. Dickens makes clear that David is rationalizing his loss as an ideal unattainable in this life, is trying to keep the feeling submerged and indefinable."<sup>8</sup> Thus when Annie Strong tells him about her own unsuccessful marriage David sees a connection between her words and his own situation, but his blindness to his own guilt does not allow him to establish an immediate realization: "'There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose.' I pondered on those words, even while I was studiously attending to what followed, as if they had some particular interest, or some strange application that I could not divine. 'There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose'--'no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose'"(45). When the



remembrance of the words returns to him again and again he begins to see that the failure of his marriage is his own fault as much as the fault of Dora's youth and weakness. But David's self-awareness is not allowed to develop fully, because his problem is solved by Dora's death.

Needham describes the "disciplining of the heart" as a kind of breakdown of self-deception. Thus Aunt Betsey hides her good heart behind a harsh exterior because of her husband's villainy. It is David who brings her back to self-awareness. The undisciplined heart is marred by the "alloy of self," or egoism. Needham concludes that Dickens' basic belief that 'real love and truth are stronger in the end than any evil and misfortune in the world' "cannot be dismissed as mere shallow optimism; his theme qualifies that only the disciplined heart can discern the nature of real love and truth, thus gaining power to conquer, and that such discipline is difficult and painful to achieve."<sup>9</sup> Again, Dickens' theme is the achievement of selflessness through the breakdown of self-deception, in this novel described as the "undisciplined heart."

While biographical interpretations are not necessary to an understanding of the situation, it is interesting to note that perhaps the reason that David's conflict is resolved by Dora's death is because of Dickens' own self-deception. Unable to fully accept his own responsibility for the failure of his marriage, he can only hint at his mistake and accept that Kate was not entirely to blame. But by eliminating Dora he is able to free David, and himself, from any further self-examination. Similarly Dickens cannot really examine his feelings for Georgina Hogarth, his sister-in-law and the Agnes of David Copperfield. David's love for Agnes is totally unknown to him,





although others, such as Betsey Trotwood, recognize it. When David marries Agnes, E.K. Brown suggests that the book stumbles and becomes unrealistic because Dickens cannot see clearly the possibilities of that situation in his own life.<sup>10</sup> The relationship between himself, his wife and her sister is as yet consciously hidden from his self-awareness.

In Great Expectations self-deception becomes an important aspect of characterization. Whereas David Copperfield is blind to his situation for a long time, Pip is continually aware that he is hiding from himself what he has always known. In a sense Dickens is now aware of his own guilt, and is able to face it through the complete destruction of Pip's expectations.

Pip's self-deception is basically his love for Estella. He knows from the beginning that it is based on false hopes, and he consciously refuses to believe it. The contrast is made between David and Pip, because David admits to thinking of Dora as superhuman.

But, though she had taken such strong possession of me, though my fancy and my hope were so set upon her, though her influence on my boyish life and character had been all-powerful, I did not, even that romantic morning, invest her with any attributes save those she possessed. I mention this in this place, of a fixed purpose, because it is the clue by which I am to be followed into my poor labyrinth. According to my experience, the conventional notion of a lover cannot be always true. The unqualified truth is that, when I loved Estella with the love of a man, I loved her simply because I found her irresistible. Once for all; I knew to my sorrow, often and often, if not always, that I loved her against reason, against promise, against peace, against hope, against happiness, against all discouragement that could be. Once for all; I loved her none the less because I knew it, and it had no more influence in restraining me than if I had devoutly believed her to be human perfection.(29)

Pip's struggle is against what he knows to be his own self-deception.

"He is not fooled; he fools himself."<sup>11</sup> When Pip goes back to town he knows that he should stay at Joe's but thinks of reasons for why he





should stay at the Blue Boar:

I should be an inconvenience at Joe's; I was not expected, and my bed would not be ready; I should be too far from Miss Havisham's, and she was exacting and mightn't like it. All other swindlers upon earth are nothing to the self-swindlers, and with such pretences did I cheat myself. Surely a curious thing. That I should innocently take a bad half-crown of somebody else's manufacture is reasonable enough; but that I should knowingly reckon the spurious coin of my own make as good money! An obliging stranger, under pretence of compactly folding up my bank-notes for security's sake, abstracts the notes and gives me nutshells; but what is his sleight of hand to mine, when I fold up my own nutshells and pass them on myself as notes! (28)

Pip's amplification of the stupidity of his deception shows that self-deception is the greatest hindrance to true, and therefore good, emotion. As with Dombey it is Pip's deception, his false idea of himself as a gentleman and a snob, that harms others. Thus his enlightenment must bring about a realization of his guilt as well as a knowledge of his true self. As usual Pip's deception is a way of protecting himself from Estella's cruelty. It is only when he can renounce his own self and see himself on equal terms with Magwitch that he can free himself from fear. Essentially Pip creates his own isolation by seeing love as a result of his aspirations, a product of the egoism that will not allow him to be "ever the best of friends" to Joe.

Mordecai Marcus, in "The Pattern of Self-Alienation in Great Expectations," explains the concept of self-alienation in terms of Kierkegaard's philosophy:

The concept of self-alienation assumes that all individuals bear within themselves the possibility of achieving a "true" self which is morally committed to furthering its own growth--its capacity for love and creativity--and that of others as well. Such a self is being continually created, avoided, or destroyed in a dialectical process which goes on within the individual and in his human relations. One classic, though diffuse and difficult, presentation of such an idea of self occurs in Soren Kierkegaard's great book The Sickness unto Death. Kierkegaard believes that all men are in varying conditions of despair (the sickness unto death) over their failure to achieve (or, better, to move forward) the authentic self. Kierkegaard sees three major types of despair:



despair at not knowing one has a self, in which case one does not make his own decisions; despair at not willing to be oneself, which creates continual self-rejection; and despair at defiantly willing to be oneself, in which case the willed self is an inauthentic and assumed self. Kierkegaard's concept of despair is clearly a theory of self-alienation, for though he regards the authentic self as something always being created or avoided, it is a kind of center from which most individuals are more or less alienated.<sup>12</sup>

Self-deception is clearly the last alternative, in which the willed self is in fact unreal. Thus Pip wants to be a gentleman instead of a blacksmith's boy. Magwitch similarly rejects his status as a criminal and hopes to become a gentleman vicariously through Pip. But as Marcus says, "Both have based their self-rejection primarily on false social values or social oppression, and both are driven by shame to desire to be something other than what they are."<sup>13</sup> Thus the motivation for self-deception is also false. The difference between the cruelty of Miss Wade or Bradley Headstone, who believe in their "inauthentic" selves, and the self-deceivers such as Pip, Dombey, Bella Wilfer and Eugene Wrayburn, is that only the truly deceived are intentionally cruel. "Both Pip and Magwitch share the tendency of the self-alienated to treat others as things, but they permit themselves such behavior out of self-deception or blindness rather than from cruel pursuit of revenge."<sup>14</sup>

Barbara Hardy again sees Pip's enlightenment in terms of the hero's sudden vision of his sin in a double or opposite. "Magwitch draws out and punishes Pip's pride and ingratitude, then delineates Pip for himself and the reader in his role as moral opposite. Finally, he provides the final ordeal which proves Pip's conversion."<sup>15</sup> But the most important factor in Pip's growing self-awareness is his conscious self-deception, the fact that he knows that his expectations are his own invention but still continues to be led on by them. The



most tragic aspect of Pip's situation is his humanity, his powerlessness to act as he knows he should. He realizes that he is leading himself into disillusionment, but he is unable to deny what at this point he holds to most strongly, his concern for self.

I have the misfortune of not being a fool. From a very early age I have detected what those about me thought they hid from me. If I could have been habitually imposed upon, instead of habitually discerning the truth, I might have lived as smoothly as most fools do.<sup>16</sup>

The worst of it is, look at it which way one will, it still turns out that I was always the most to blame in everything. And what is most humiliating of all, to blame for no fault of my own but, so to say, through the laws of nature. In the first place, to blame because I am cleverer than any of the people surrounding me. (I have always considered myself cleverer than any of the people surrounding me, and sometimes, would you believe it, have been positively ashamed of it. At any rate, I have all my life, as it were, turned my eyes away and never could look people straight in the face.)<sup>17</sup>

Miss Wade, like the Underground man and all of Dickens' villains, suffers from a misconception: she has come to believe implicitly in what is false. Her belief that her benefactors' kindness was actually hypocritical condescension may have originated, like Martin Chuzzlewit's selfishness, from an early need for self-protection. In fact it is a characteristic of Dickens' characters that their self-deceptions are often based on a mistaken sense of injustice or persecution. Thus Dombey feels that Florence is purposely opposing him. David Copperfield thinks that Dora has failed him because of her weakness; Pip's sense of Mrs. Joe's injustice becomes a belief that Joe too has not treated him fairly. "I don't know what possessed me, Joe...but I wish you hadn't taught me to call knaves at cards jacks"(9). Bradley Headstone thinks that everyone belittles him for his pauper birth. But the difference between the characters who lose their egocentricity and those who do not is that the former are aware, constantly, that their sense of injustice is false. They know that in order to deceive themselves as to their





own fault, they put the fault on to others. It is only when the deception becomes the reality, as in the case of Miss Wade, that the essential goodness of the person becomes stifled. Miss Wade has the capacity for love, but she makes it hate. Similarly Headstone turns his love for Lizzie into a jealous and avenging self-torment. The two stories are linked by an image. Just as Headstone drowns himself and Riderhood, his arms never releasing their hold, so does Miss Wade imagine herself drowning with the girl she both loves and hates:

"...loving her as much as ever, and often feeling as if, rather than suffer so, I could so hold her in my arms and plunge to the bottom of a river--where I would still hold her after we were both dead"(57).

Miss Wade's sense of persecution has become an actuality to her, but for Tattycoram the attitude that Miss Wade tries to force upon her never becomes real because Tattycoram realizes it as self-deception. Like Dombey she tries to blame others in order to protect herself, but she always knows that she is unjust in doing so. "I knew she had got a power over me, through understanding what was bad in me so well. It was a madness in me, and she could raise it whenever she liked. I used to think, when I got into that state, that people were all against me because of my first beginning; and the kinder they were to me, the worse fault I found in them. I made out that they triumphed above me, and that they wanted to make me envy them, when I know--when I even knew then, if I would--that they never thought of such a thing"(69). Tattycoram's explanation is indicative of much of the motivation of Dickens' characters. Like the others it is her good nature that she denies. The distorted and false side is easily promoted because the person believes, or tries to believe, that that is the truth. Carker's power over Edith





is the same as Miss Wade's over Tattycoram, because they both know the distorted side of their victim. Neither can predict that their power will eventually fail because both Edith and Tattycoram are aware of their own real worth. Tattycoram describes her distortion of the truth as a "madness," as in fact it becomes in Bradley Headstone.

In each instance of self-deception the character denies his knowledge of his true, and good, self, and believes in a false exterior. Usually his sense of the wrongness of his false impression leads him to blame others for a fault in himself which is basically untrue anyway because it originates in a distortion. Thus Pip blames Joe and his wife for making him "common," even though Pip is unconsciously aware that he is not. Dombey blames Florence for making him hate her, even though he knows he really cares for her. Tattycoram blames other people for thinking she is inferior, when she knows that she is not. In each case the deceiver knows his true self, and that the blame is a way of keeping up the self-deception, whereas Miss Wade and Bradley Headstone have no knowledge of a possible good side because they have come to believe in the blame as genuine.

It is the distortion of truth that leads each character into self-initiated isolation. In each case the self-deceiver denies ties that actually exist. Thus Pip rejects the mutual understanding that had existed between himself and Joe. Miss Wade and Tattycoram reject the love that is freely offered to them, and Edith thinks that she is not worthy of Florence's trust. Dombey believes that he is independent until the breakdown of his deception shows him the falsity of such a belief.

While the complexities of Dickens' characters make a definitive



judgment of them impossible, the concept of self-deception is clearly central to the motivation of many of them. The growth of deception from the basic deception of others, perpetrated by characters such as Jingle in Pickwick Papers, to self-deception and final belief in the distortion presents an aspect of some of Dickens' themes that has not been studied. The realization of self-deception as a motive is essential to an understanding of the characters as infinitely more complex than critics such as Barbara Hardy have suggested. Dombey and Son is centred around the idea of self-deception, its motivation and effect on character. Dombey, Edith, Carker and Mrs. Skewton are all self-deceived, for different reasons and with different results. But in each case the awareness of misguided wrong and eventual isolation is central to the person's self-awareness.

While Great Expectations offers as complex a study of self-deception in Pip as is found in Dombey, that particular aspect of character is not as central to the book as a whole as it is in Dombey and Son. Our Mutual Friend is an interesting novel to examine in the light of the interrelation between deception, isolation, and distortion and the effects of a non-personal deception on the whole society. While self-deceivers purposely obtain a false and distorted view of their situation, in Our Mutual Friend life as most people have come to see it is false. In the desire for money, a false goal in itself, people have been led to deny their genuine value in the struggle to survive. Thus self-deception is caused now by the pressures of society rather than by personal factors. Charley Hexam, Mrs. Lammle, Bella and Eugene are all led to deny their own worth in order to survive in a money-oriented world. The isolation that results is again self-initiated



but it is the result of a buy and sell attitude towards other people. While the theme of regeneration through drowning has been discussed in detail by various critics, it is in another sense rather a descent into each person's own nature to discover the source of the conflict between the society-imposed mask and the true identity.

Our Mutual Friend also offers a range of self-deceivers, from the central characters, Bella and Eugene, to Charley Hexam, whose deception becomes reality, and Bradley Headstone, whose deception becomes madness. Thus Mrs. Skewton's protestation that we are "dreadfully real" becomes symbolic of a whole society, but it is a deception that can be realized and overcome by the breakdown of self-deception and the individual's acceptance of his true worth.





## CHAPTER II

### DOMBEY AND SON

Dombey and Son is the first novel in which Dickens successfully examines the working out of the problems of deception. As Mrs. Tillotson has pointed out, the novel greatly surpasses Dickens' intentions of doing with pride "what its predecessor had done with Selfishness."<sup>1</sup> She writes: "Not only the comedy, but all the characters and all the action are subordinated to Mr. Dombey. This is the first novel of Dickens to be dominated by a leading idea, embodied in a single character. He is the origin, centre and continuum of the novel, as no previous character of Dickens's had been."<sup>2</sup> Dickens explains in his Preface, written in answer to criticism of Dombey's "sudden" change, that his main concern in the novel is with self-deception: "Mr. Dombey undergoes no violent internal change, either in this book, or in life. A sense of his injustice is within him all along. The more he represses it, the more unjust he necessarily is. Internal shame and external circumstances may bring the contest to the surface in a week, or a day; but it has been a contest for years, and is only fought out after a long balance of victory."

Other critics see Dickens' concern in the novel as being with society rather than with the individual, and with influences on personality, rather than personal outlook. Edgar Johnson's comment is typical: "Dickens describes the theme of Dombey and Son as pride, but Mr. Dombey's pride, though a dark and omnipresent strand in the story, is not its dominant principle. That principle is the callous inhumanity of an economic doctrine that strips Mr. Dombey's relations with everyone to an assertion of monetary power."<sup>3</sup> Johnson's argument is based upon





Dombey's bargain and sale attitudes towards the Toodles, Carker and Edith. But Dombey's relationships are not governed by an "economic doctrine" but by a fear of emotion within himself. Money is one way of setting up barriers between himself and others. For example, when he meets Toodle in the railway station he immediately offers him money in order to prevent Toodle from having any connection with Dombey's memory of Paul's death. If Dombey believed that money could give him power, the offer would have had its effect, but it fails, and Dombey is embarrassed. "Mr. Dombey was stopped short now in his turn: and awkwardly: with his hand in his pocket"(XX). Thus Dickens' concern is with Dombey's use of money rather than with his being a victim of it. It is Dombey's almost conscious denial of his spiritual and emotional nature, and his ever-present realization that Florence understands it, that constitutes the theme of the novel.

The conflict within Dombey's nature is introduced in the first few pages when his outward calm is disrupted by Florence's affection for her mother. It is later explained that Dombey sees Florence's rejection of Paul in favour of Fanny, who needs her more at that time, as a slight to him, but at this point Florence's openness shows Dombey's uneasiness with emotion. When he kisses Paul he goes "awkwardly enough" away, "seeming to fear that the action involved some compromise of his dignity" (IV). Dickens suggests in the word "seeming" that Dombey was not really afraid of his loss of dignity, but rather of his own nature. Similarly Dickens says that Dombey's regret over his wife's death would be a "cool, business-like, gentlemanly, self-possessed regret, no doubt"(VI). While this is partly an echo of how Dombey himself would put it, it also suggests that there is a doubt. In Chapter III, Dickens explains Dombey's reaction



to his daughter's unrestrained love for her mother. He is no longer indifferent to Florence, as the memory of her and Fanny is "at once a revelation and a reproach to him." He is never mentioned in Mrs. Dombey's death scene; now he admits to himself that he was a spectator with no part in it. But already Dombey blames his daughter for what he cannot admit to as his own fault. He was "quite shut out."

Already Polly has seen Dombey's isolation: "From the glimpses she caught of Mr. Dombey at these times, sitting in the dark distance, looking out towards the infant from among the dark, heavy furniture...she began to entertain ideas of him in his solitary state, as if he were a lone prisoner in a cell, or a strange apparition that was not to be accosted or understood"(III). Because Florence is his daughter she does understand him, and thus cannot be shut out as is the rest of the world. The constant memory of Florence and her mother brings to Dombey the realization of his own love, and Florence's recognition of it: "He almost felt as if she watched and distrusted him. As if she held the clue to something secret in his breast, of the nature of which he was hardly informed himself. As if she had an innate knowledge of one jarring and discordant string within him, and her very breath could sound it"(III). As Dombey's understanding of himself increases he puts up more barriers between his conscious thoughts and his unconscious awareness. Thus Dickens continually keeps Mr. Dombey's mental state mysterious. The use of unanswered questions is a frequent device: "Perhaps--who shall decide on such mysteries?--he was afraid that he might come to hate her"(III). Dombey's realization of his own inability to accept love causes him to blame Florence. "It was a dagger in the haughty father's heart, an arrow in his brain, to see how the flesh and blood he could not disown



clung to this obscure stranger, and he sitting by. Not that he cared to whom his daughter turned, or from whom turned away"(VI). The implication of course is that he does care, and realizes it is his own fault if she turns away from him.

Dombey's attitude to Paul is very different. He regards him as an adjunct of himself, since "Dombey and Son" refers to Dombey alone. Even Paul calls his father "Dombey and Son." When Dombey pities Paul the lack of a mother, Dickens says that he is really pitying himself. His love for Paul is selfish: "Mr. Dombey's young child was, from the beginning, so distinctly important to him as a part of his own greatness, or (which is the same thing) of the greatness of Dombey and Son, that there is no doubt his parental affection might have been easily traced, like many a goodly superstructure of fair fame, to a very low foundation" (VIII). After the meeting with Toodles, Dombey resents the fact that Paul did not realize the meaning of "Dombey and Son." "To think that this lost child, who was to have divided with him his riches, and his projects, and his power, and allied with whom he was to have shut out all the world as with a double door of gold, should have let in such a herd to insult him with their knowledge of his defeated hopes, and their boasts of claiming community of feeling with himself, so far removed: if not of having crept into the place wherein he would have lorded it alone!"(XX) Because Dombey's love for Paul is selfish, it is also non-emotional and thus acceptable to him. It is only when he begins to see Paul as his son, the brother of Florence and thus a part of his spiritual nature, that he is affected, as when he watches Florence carrying Paul up the staircase. But as in his reaction to Florence's love for her mother, Dombey understands, and then resents, Paul's love for Florence. When





Miss Tox suggests that Paul will not go to Brighton without Florence, Mr. Dombey takes up a book and stares at it blankly for an hour. As Dombey and Florence leave Paul at Brighton, Paul cares only for Florence, and this knowledge cuts Dombey to the heart: "If his sight were dimmed, as he did so, by something that for a moment blurred the little face, and made it indistinct to him, his mental vision may have been, for that short time, the clearer, perhaps"(XI). If it were only jealousy that Dombey felt at this point, his mental vision would not be clearer. Thus what he recognizes must be the love between Florence and Paul, an emotion that he cannot accept in himself.

It is after Paul's funeral that Dombey's struggle reaches a climax. There is a hint of his silent fear concerning Florence at the funeral, when the statuary points out the mistake on the memorial inscription: Mr. Dombey had written "Beloved and only child." He walks with a hastier step and for the first time hides his face with his cloak. For days he remains shut up in his rooms, until one night Florence goes in to him, encouraged by a ray of light that suggests hope to her, shining through the crack in his open door. He asks her why she came, against his wishes. "She saw he knew why; it was written broadly on his face: and dropped her head upon her hands with one prolonged low cry"(XVIII). What Dombey and Florence both realize in this instant is that Dombey loves Florence but because of his fear, jealousy and pride he cannot admit it to himself. She came, not just because she loved him, but because she had seen in the ray of light that he loved her. It is this scene that returns to him in his final desolation. "Let him remember it in that room, years to come." He remembers, not that he once hated his daughter, but that she saw his love, and he refused to accept it himself. "It may pass quickly from





his brain, as he believes, but it is there." Dombey tries to deny Florence's understanding, but is haunted by it from now on. The duality in his mind is emphasized again by the use of questions: "Did he see before him the successful rival of his son, in health and life? Did he look upon his own successful rival in that son's affection? Did a mad jealousy and withered pride poison sweet remembrances that should have endeared and made her precious to him? Could it be possible that it was gall to him to look upon her in her beauty and her promise: thinking of his infant boy?"(XVIII). Dombey thinks he sees Florence only in those ways, just as he believes that he will forget her cry, but the whole answer to the question is not given.

In order to shield himself from his true emotion, and reinforce his proud exterior, Mr. Dombey befriends the major: "If Mr. Dombey had any lingering idea that the major...might unconsciously impart some useful philosophy to him, and scare away his weak regrets, he hid it from himself, and left it lying at the bottom of his pride, unexamined"(XX). Dombey has another use for Bagstock. In the train to Leamington he looks for something to place between himself and his thoughts of Florence. The next paragraph begins with the major telling Dombey not to be so thoughtful. Later, Carker also comes between Dombey and Florence. "Under the skilful culture of the manager, angry thoughts in reference to poor Florence brooded and bred in Mr. Dombey's breast"(XXVI). The sentence is joined by a semi-colon to "Major Bagstock, much admired by the old ladies of Leamington....." Thus Florence now has to contend with two opponents.

Dombey's visions in the train emphasize again the duality of his thoughts. He remembers her face from the night before, reproaching him



for changing her hope into certainty of his dislike. His fear of Florence, whose eyes "read his soul," forces him to see her as an enemy, as the cause of his misery and an aggravation of his bitterness. He could have lost her without a pang, "or he believed it"(XX). Dombey consciously thinks of Florence in these terms as a means of ridding himself of his own guilt: "He rejected the anger, and took up with the tormenting spirit crouching in his bosom."

"More than once upon this journey, and now again as he stood pondering at this journey's end, tracing figures in the dust with his stick, the thought came into his mind, what was there he could interpose between himself and it?"(XX) Dombey's search for a barrier to shut out Florence ends in Edith. As he thinks about his marriage, visions of Florence come to him again: "Whether as a foredoomed difficulty and disappointment to him; whether as a rival who had crossed him in his way, and might again; whether as his child, of whom, in his successful wooing, he could stoop to think, as claiming, at such a time, to be no more estranged; or whether as a hint to him that the mere appearance of caring for his own blood should be maintained in his new relations; he best knew"(XXX). With the expectation of Edith's pride reinforcing his own, he is less afraid of Florence's nearness to him. When he returns home after the wedding, his face expresses more interest and even surprise than Florence has ever seen. There is a suggestion that, assured of an emotionless relationship with his wife, Dombey is bored. Florence finds him walking to and fro in "dreary magnificence." As Dombey watches her unknown, his face hidden by a handkerchief, Dickens retains the mystery of Dombey's thoughts by offering suggestions. He may have seen that he had "wandered away and lost himself"(XXXV). He may only have seen her



as a beautiful addition to the pomp and ornament in his possession. But as he finally comes to a realization of his two children being one, Edith interrupts and a darkness settles on his face. At this point the meaning of Dombey's change of mood is ambiguous. It is ironic that Edith is the cause, as Dombey had intended her to come between himself and Florence. But it is not until later that the darkness is explained. Dombey, perhaps out of cowardice, watches Edith coming out of Florence's room, her face changed from its usual haughty scorn: "But, it could never alter as his own did. It never, in all its utmost pride and passion, knew the shadow that had fallen on his, in the dark corner, on the night of the return and often since; and which deepened on it now as he looked up"(XXXVI). Dombey's face will alter, which indicates that the shadow is connected with his realization of his love for Florence and his need to keep it hidden because of Edith. He knows that Edith loves Florence and despises him; therefore his pride prevents him from showing his own love for Florence. From now on it is Edith who turns Dombey more and more against Florence by forcing him to hide his love, even from himself. Edith's opposition makes Dombey's pride more unyielding and intense that it has ever been, and it is because of this added armour that Dombey consciously embitters himself against Florence. "Who could it be, but the same child at whom he had often glanced uneasily in her motherless infancy, with a kind of dread lest he might come to hate her; and of whom his foreboding was fulfilled, for he DID hate her in his heart?"(XL) Edgar Johnson cites this passage as an example of Dombey's growing resentment towards Florence, but he does not quote the rest of the passage in which Dickens explains Dombey's conscious struggle to keep his pride above his love: "Yes, and he would have it hatred, and he made it hatred, though some sparkles of







the light in which she had appeared, on the memorable night of his return home with his bride, occasionally hung about her still....In his sullen and unwholesome brooding, the unhappy man, with a dull perception of his alienation from all hearts, and a vague yearning for what he had all his life repelled, made a distorted picture of his rights and wrongs, and justified himself with it against her"(XL). Again he blames Florence for crossing him and "winning" Paul and Edith, as though she had purposely set herself in opposition to him. It is one of the ironies of Florence's situation that other people put Dombey against her while she is completely innocent of blame. Carker and the Major are not the only ones who influence Dombey. The love that Fanny, Paul and Edith have for Florence is seen by Dombey as consciously acquired by Florence in order to slight him. Even Susan's outburst, done solely out of love for Florence, has the opposite effect of that intended and steels Dombey even more.

When Dombey's crowning humility occurs with Edith's elopement, it is on Florence that he vents his initial anger. And yet the one thing that he does not consider is that she could have gone. He no longer pretends that he could lose her without a thought, or wishes her lost; in fact he sees her as the last person over which he has power. Knowing that Edith and Carker have humiliated him, and that the world is laughing, only the thought of Florence, patient and loving still, keeps him shaken but not humbled. Again, it is by blaming Florence that he can keep a semblance of self-assurance in his own mind. Only when Walter's letter comes with the news that Florence has left does he understand fully his own nature.

Most modern critics fault Dombey and Son on the character of the heroine, saying that Florence is too passive to carry such a large role. Kathleen Tillotson writes: "A character conceived in terms of pure



feeling, passive, innocent to the point of being almost 'incapable of her own distress', can hardly sustain this prominence...Conflict within her, introspection, or initiative, would mitigate the pathos of her situation; unmitigated, the pathos risks monotony, if not self-defeat."<sup>4</sup> Steven Marcus describes Florence as a child whose grace "appears simply as the ability to feel affection, to respond to people with openness and fullness, to accede to the conditions of life, to sustain oneself through its changes, to be able to love."<sup>5</sup> But Florence undergoes more suffering and more introspection than almost any other character. It is her power over Dombey that provides the major conflict of the novel.

Florence is as much the heroine of Dombey and Son as Little Dorrit is of that novel, and her absence from the title is the first ironic indication of her role. Her name was originally linked with Dombey after Paul's death, when Miss Tox remarks that Dombey and Son is now a daughter. The sentence was omitted after the book appeared as a whole. Mrs. Tillotson argues that it should have been retained, as it sums up the conflict past and to come and was only left out when Dickens started readings of that passage.<sup>6</sup> D.S. Bland replies that the sentence should be omitted because it gives too much away.<sup>7</sup> A further consideration is that at this point in the book the statement is not true. Florence has no connection with "Dombey and Son," a term which means her father in his proud and solitary role. Miss Tox's statement becomes true only when Dombey is no longer "Dombey and Son." Thus she repeats it after the reconciliation.

After Paul's death, Dickens' plan was to throw the interest on to Florence. He does so by concentrating the effect of the boy's death on his sister's reaction, and it is a highly mature and non-sentimental emotion that Florence experiences. She does not notice the melancholy



rain, as her true misery excludes what Dickens has already called "that cheapest and most accessible of luxuries." Florence is similarly untouched by the gloom of the empty house. The walls stare at her "as if they had a Gorgon-like mind to stare her youth and beauty into stone," but Florence blooms regardless. Her strength against suffering is the characteristic that most turns Dombey against her, as she flourishes without him while Paul, protected by him, died. Florence is proof against all suffering except the loss of her husband's love: "The confidence and love of children may be given many times, and will spring up in many places; but the woman's heart of Florence, with its undivided treasure, can be yielded only once, and, under slight or change, can only droop and die" (LVIII). Thus the nature of Florence's capacity for love is not merely the natural love of a daughter for her father, but is the fully developed love of a woman for a man. Similarly her love for Edith is not the simple, spontaneous love of a passive child of grace, but expresses the most important aspect of human feeling, lack of jealousy. "In her thoughts of her new mother, and in her love and trust overflowing her pure heart towards her, Florence loved her own dead mother more and more. She had no fear of setting up a rival in her breast. The new flower sprang from a deep-planted and long-cherished root, she knew. Every gentle word that had fallen from the lips of the beautiful lady sounded to Florence like an echo of the voice long hushed and silent. How could she love that memory less for living tenderness, when it was her memory of all parental tenderness and love?"(XXX) The same attitude can be seen in her relationship with Walter. In loving him she does not set him up as a rival to Paul; rather, her love for Walter is a way of continuing to love Paul. In contrast, Dombey's fear of emotion causes him to see





anyone associated with Paul as a rival, especially his daughter. Knowing that he cannot openly admit to loving the boy, he is jealous of anyone coming between them.

Florence's thoughts are complex; her love for her father becomes a torment when she considers the consequences of it. She fears that she will turn Paul and her mother against him by weeping for him, imagining them watching from Heaven. It is Florence's depth of introspection, not the lack of it, that leads her to believe that it is her fault that Dombey rejects her. Her love for her father changes. At first she thinks that he does not know how much she loves him, and then that he rejected her because her love was not strong enough. It is because Florence realizes Dombey's unadmitted love that she blames herself, and her continual response to what she recognizes in his nature increases her suffering. She says that she had never "won his fatherly affection from birth." She knows of the presence of his affection, but has been unsuccessful in drawing it out. Sometimes she thinks that Dombey did love her once. She refers to her "turning her father's love adrift" and wants to win his love "again." Her introspection leads her to think of her love for Edith and Dombey with "fear, distrust and wonder" when she finds that the two are estranged. When she finally gives up hope of Edith's showing her how to win Dombey's love, she loves him as though he were dead. With the climactic blow, Florence does not cower meekly, like a passive child, but understands her position, at that moment, in her father's heart. She sees that she was right in hoping that Dombey's love for her would triumph over his proud exterior, but that his final humiliation has only strengthened that wall. It is the first time that Florence has really seen his cruel side: "But she looked at him, and a cry of desolation issued from





her heart. For, as she looked, she saw him murdering that fond idea to which she had held in spite of him. She saw his cruelty, neglect and hatred dominant above it, and stamping it down. She saw she had no father upon earth, and ran out, orphaned, from his house"(XLVIII). After her flight she avoids the thought of him because she cannot accept that he does not love her. Dombey has achieved his end by denying to Florence her understanding of him: "She had seen the murder done. In the last lingering natural aspect in which she had cherished him through so much, he had been torn out of her heart, defaced, and slain"(XLIX).

It is Walter who brings Florence and Dombey together. Florence realizes again her position as a daughter when she has a child herself, Walter's son. Dombey's acceptance of his true nature is begun by Walter's letter, and a phrase that echoes the meeting with Florence in his room. Of the reason for Walter's taking Florence away he writes, "You know why, and you are her father." Dombey knows that Walter loves her, just as Florence saw that Dombey loved her that night.

An important aspect of Florence's character is her understanding of unity. When she first tries to approach her father, it is because they have a common love for Paul, and her recollections of Paul are the same thing in her mind as her love for Dombey. When she sees Dombey sleeping, she sees his sleep as life and death in one. It is the division between Dombey and Edith that troubles her. She tries to love them both, knowing that they are in opposition: "So, in her sleep, she tried to reconcile the two together, and to show them that she loved them both, but could not do it, and her waking grief was part of her dreams"(XIIIL). When Edith has to ignore Florence to prevent Dombey's disapproval Florence is free to love them both as equal shadows in her imagination. Dombey in his



isolation understands unity and its consequent lack of jealousy or rivalry only in his moments of self-awareness. As he watches Florence from beneath the handkerchief, he sees her not as a rival, "monstrous thought," but "blended with the child he had loved, and he could hardly separate the two"(XXXV). With his final realization comes the unity of Paul and Florence in his thoughts. It is because of this that Dombey's meeting with Florence occurs first through his vision in the mirror. Dickens says that if Dombey had seen her on the street he would have walked past without relaxing his face. Only by seeing himself with Florence in the mirror can Dombey understand the unification of love; no longer in his isolation looking out at her, he and Florence are now in the same world.

The contrast between egoism and selflessness is a major theme of the novel, connected to deception because of the need of the egoist to protect himself. Paul is perhaps the most powerful example of the meek nature, innocent in his lack of self-consciousness. Usually the child is characterized by egocentricity, like David Copperfield and Pip, but Paul's strength, the quality in him that confounds those around him and causes them to think him "old-fashioned," is his lack of egoism. An interesting example can be seen in the difference between Paul and his school-mates. When he is leaving Blimber's Academy "he could not bear to think that they would be quite indifferent to him when he was gone. He wanted them to remember him kindly; and he had made it his business even to conciliate a great, hoarse, shaggy dog, chained up at the back of the house, who had previously been the terror of his life: that even he might miss him when he was no longer there. Little thinking that in this he only showed again the difference between himself and his compeers,



poor tiny Paul set it forth to Miss Blimber as well as he could, and begged her, in despite of the official analysis, to have the goodness to try and like him"(XIV). The selfish person would not be interested in being remembered, because he himself is not there. He is concerned only with his own immediate experience and nothing else has any significance. When Paul leaves, Dickens says that it is unlike the other boys to cry individually, "Dombey, don't forget me!"

The spontaneity of Florence is another aspect of selflessness. Having no need to put up protective shields of pretence, she is open to every cruelty from her father. She never even attempts to rationalize his behaviour but holds to her continual faith in his basic goodness. The opposite attitude is seen in Miss Wade's distortion of kindness to cruelty. Florence's continual desire to go to her father, even when she has just been turned away, shows her lack of concern for herself. Her refusal to think about him after she flees his house is not in order to protect herself because she does not consciously avoid the thought. Dombey had destroyed her hope, and thus destroyed her idea of him.

Paul too has no need to protect himself by pretence. His openness with Mrs. Pipchin and his father unnerves them because they are used to submissiveness. Dombey cannot deny his son's honesty, and knows that he has no power over the fearless boy. Paul is not deceived by Dombey's attempts to answer when he asks him what money is, because he intuitively understands Dombey's insecurity.

Because egocentricity and its resulting need for protection requires deception, there is an important focus in the novel on sight and influence, and the breaking down of pretence through vision. J. Hillis Miller refers to it as "a movement from mere passive perception





to psychological interaction."<sup>8</sup> On a non-symbolic level the concept is expressed in several of the illustrations. The Major watches Miss Tox from his window, through binoculars. There is a face at the window when Toots kisses Susan at the front door of Dombey's house, Rob watches Captain Cuttle and Bunsby from the skylight, and a face watches from behind a screen as Dombey and Florence are reunited. Alice and her mother spy on Carker, and Dombey watches from behind a door as Rob writes out the destination of Edith and Carker. In each situation the watcher is endeavouring to understand, or take a part in, the scene he is watching. Sight becomes a way of overcoming the various deceptions that each character assumes. For the sympathetic characters it is a way of arriving at a mutual understanding, or even a sense of unity. For the deceivers it is a power game, where each protected egoist attempts to hide his own thoughts but understand his opponent's, and make that opponent aware of his knowledge. Miller notices a similar "conflict of masks" in Our Mutual Friend: "Each person tries to hide his own secret and to probe behind a misleading surface and find the secrets of others. The prize of a successful uncovering is the power that goes with knowing and not being known."<sup>9</sup> The breakdown of deception through vision is sometimes achieved through the influence of the sympathetic characters. Florence and Harriet both have the ability to bring out the better nature of the deceivers, and it is Harriet's eyes which affect Alice as she is dying.

The contrast between the blindness of self-deception and the closeness and understanding of unselfishness is seen in the visits of Dombey and Florence to Paul's window at Dr. Blimber's. Florence passes and repasses until she sees Paul, and then "their mutual recognition was a gleam of sunshine in Paul's daily life." Dombey would come "unrecognized,"



and "wait, and watch, and plan, and hope"(XII). Because it is for himself that he watches, it is immaterial whether Paul even knows he is there. "Oh! could he but have seen, or seen as others did, the slight, spare boy above, watching the waves and clouds at twilight with his earnest eyes, and breasting the window of his solitary cage when birds flew by, as if he would have emulated them, and soared away!" Concerned only with himself, Dombey is unable to look at his children except with the blindness of his deception. When Florence comes to him he would have understood her fear "had he looked with greater interest, and with a father's eye"(III). It is a look of interest that leads Florence to hope that her father loves her, and his final recognition of his importance as a father is seen in the last passage of the book, when he ensures that his granddaughter will understand the unity of love: "He only answers, 'Little Florence! Little Florence!' and smooths away the curls that shade her earnest eyes."

For Toots, as for others, sight is a way of entering the same world. He watches Paul at Blimber's, and moves his position at the dinner table in order to see him constantly. When the banns are being read to announce Florence's marriage to Walter, Toots watches through the church windows, dodging from one to the next as he becomes aware of the congregation watching him. Like Mr. Morfin, who walks past Harriet's house every week so that he can see her, he is comforted by being able to see Florence. There is no need to avoid sight as there is for the deceivers, as the sympathetic characters are interested with outward perceptions. Thus Florence watches the family across the street. At the dance the boys leave a space so that Paul can always see Florence. Paul's visions are symbolic of the clarity of perception of the child.



He has not been misled by the distortions that blind Dombey, Carker and Edith. "When day began to dawn again, he watched for the sun; and when its cheerful light began to sparkle in the room, he pictured to himself-- pictured! he saw--the high church towers..."(XVI).

Dombey's pride is partly caused by his need to repress his love for Florence, but the proud arrogance that becomes a mask also makes him underrate others. Aware that he is not as indomitable as he might wish, he blinds himself to the knowledge and becomes prouder. Florence's independence in spite of him is an early and lasting cause of annoyance. He had a "sharp misgiving, recently acquired, that he was not infallible in his power of bending and binding human wills"(V). It is because he knows that he is not infallible that he fears opposition, and ironically, while he blames Florence for deliberately crossing him, he is blind to his real enemies, Carker and Edith. They are an adjunct of his proud exterior, or so he believes, and thus they do not threaten him. Only Florence, who understands his genuine nature, is a threat to his peace and therefore must be shut out by taking the blame for his own unhappiness.

One reason for Dombey's blindness to others can be seen in Dickens' discussion of unnaturalness. "Coop any son or daughter of our mighty mother within narrow range, and bind the prisoner to one idea, and foster it by servile worship of it on the part of the few timid or designing people standing around, and what is Nature to the willing captive who has never risen up upon the wings of a free mind--drooping and useless soon-- to see her in her comprehensive truth?"(XLVII) Dombey's exterior had never been threatened before. His first wife had brought about no change in his bearing: "He had kept his distant seat of state on the top of his throne, and she her humble station on its lowest step; and much good





it had done him, so to live in solitary bondage to his one idea"(XL). The interesting point about Florence, as with Little Dorrit, is that although she loves her father she never encourages his pride.

While subservience feeds pride by acknowledging the alleged greatness, Edith's opposition feeds it equally, because it forces Dombey to reinforce his idea of himself. Because his domination is founded on a false idea he is conscious of his vulnerability and has to deceive himself as well as others into believing he is impervious. Like all imposters he has to blame others for what he recognizes as his own self-deception. "It seemed his fate to be ever proud and powerful; ever humbled and powerless where he would be most strong. Who seemed fated to work out that doom?"(XL) But Dombey's blame of Florence is not as dangerous as that of Miss Wade because Dombey is aware that he is doing it on purpose, even if the awareness is scarcely conscious. Miss Wade, a further progression in the study of egocentricity and self-deception, really believes that her benefactors are malicious. Even if originally the belief was caused by a lack of self-esteem it has become an unquestionable certainty in her mind. Without the influence of a person who is aware of his genuine nature, the monomaniac eventually convinces himself.

Another aspect of the growth of self-deception is expressed by what Mr. Morfin calls habit: "I have good reason to believe that a jog-trot life, the same from day to day, would reconcile one to anything; that's the fact. We go on taking everything for granted, and so we go on, until whatever we do, good, bad, or indifferent, we do from habit. Habit is all I shall have to report, when I am called upon to plead to my conscience on my death-bed. 'Habit,' says I, 'I was deaf, dumb,





blind, and paralytic to a million things, from habit'"(XXXIII). Edith's blindness to her better nature, her self-deception that leads her to believe that she is irredeemable, is partly caused by habit. Because she has been brought up by her mother, and was influenced by her before she knew it, she is unable to act against her: "I have dreamed that in a first late effort to achieve a purpose, it [pride] has been trodden on, and trodden down by a base foot, but turns and looks upon him. I have dreamed of such indifference and callousness, arising from this self-contempt; this wretched, inefficient, miserable pride; that it has gone on with listless steps even to the altar, yielding to the old, familiar, beckoning finger,--oh, mother, oh mother!--while it spurned it; and willing to be hateful to itself for once and for all, rather than to be stung daily in some new form. Mean, poor thing!"(XLIII). Because Edith despises herself she thinks that everyone else must, and thus she hides her contempt and fear behind a mask of pride and self-possession: "The broad, high mirrors showed her, at full length, a woman with a noble quality yet dwelling in her nature, who was too false to her better self, and too debased and lost, to save herself. She believed that all this was so plain, more or less, to all eyes, that she had no resource or power of self-assertion but in pride: and with this pride, which tortured her own heart night and day, she fought her fate out, braved it, and defied it"(XXX). Alice too considers herself a "fallen woman," forced into degradation by her mother and incapable of redemption. It is Harriet who shows her that goodness, not evil, is inherent in her by "woman's looks and words, and angel's deeds"(LVIII). Alice is even moved to try and save Carker from Dombey's wrath because she realizes the falsity of revenge.

Because Edith has never been influenced by a genuine person, she



denies the existence of genuine feeling in herself, and acts out of this mistaken knowledge: "The germ of all that purifies a woman's breast, and makes it true and good, has never stirred in mine, and I have nothing else to sustain me when I despise myself!"(XXVIII). With the example of her mother before her, Edith refuses to see that she can act independently, even though she understands her mother's corruption. "If you had but left me to my natural heart when I too was a girl--a younger girl than Florence--how different I might have been!"(XXX) Although she denies her own goodness when she tells Florence "Never seek to find in me... what is not here"(XXXV), Florence responds automatically to it, just as she does with Dombey. In a sense Edith's self-deception is more harmful than Dombey's, because while he denies his better nature Edith thinks that she should have a good side but that it has been lost irrevocably by her upbringing. Dombey struggles, but Edith does not because she sees herself as totally debased. Thus her face "could never alter as his own did"(XXXVI). Dombey's pride is an unexamined mask, a sense of domination that has been fed by subservience, flattery and the threat of opposition, whereas Edith's pride is partly a defence against others and partly a way of debasing herself in her own eyes: "I have dreamed...of a pride that is all-powerless for good, all-powerful for evil; of a pride that has been galled and goaded, through many shameful years, and has never recoiled except upon itself; a pride that has debased its owner with the consciousness of deep humiliation, and never helped its owner boldly to resent it or avoid it, or to say, 'This shall not be!' a pride that, rightly guided, might have led perhaps to better things, but which, misdirected and perverted, like all else belonging to the same possessor, has been self-contempt, mere hardiheart and ruin"(XLIV).



It is Edith's self-persecution that allows her to be taken in by Carker. She is blinded by "self-humiliation," and allows him to draw close to her in order to feed her "fierce resentment." The fact that Edith's sense of degradation is self-deception that has not become a total obsession like that of Miss Wade is shown by the scene at Dijon. Critics tend to see Edith's elopement as a mistake on Dickens' part, a criticism resulting from the knowledge that Dickens originally intended Edith to commit adultery. Lord Jeffrey wrote to Dickens that he did not want Edith to be Carker's mistress, so Dickens made the change accordingly. But not only does the false elopement provide Edith with a brilliant means of overcoming both the master and the man, but it also is in keeping with the conflict within her. If Edith had felt unquestioningly that she was evil, she would not have allowed any contact with Florence at all. It is only when Dombey's cruelty to Florence and threats to separate Edith from her make her desire revenge that she shrinks from Florence. She knows that her actions are corrupt, even though they spring from a genuine motive. Thus when she confronts Carker at Dijon she relies on the one aspect of her self-knowledge that he does not know, her conscience, or newly motivated faith in her better nature. He knows that she is a victim of upbringing, the flattery of friends, and "habit": "Grown too indifferent for any opposition but indifference to the daily working of the hands that had moulded me to this"(LIV). But Carker also relies on the fact that she hates herself sufficiently not to care what happens to her, and thus to become his pawn to revenge herself on Dombey. But Carker does not know that she is now aware of an inner honesty that cannot be destroyed by self-humiliation. Because of Florence she is able to accept her own worth







and overcome a man whose own lack of conscience makes him incapable of foreseeing its presence in others. When Florence visits Edith at the end, Edith admits that habit, or the way she has led herself to feel debased, has caused her to deny her true nature: "Before I am mad again, before my stubbornness comes back and strikes me dumb, believe me, upon my soul, I am innocent"(LXI).

Mrs. Skewton's duplicity is one of the most horrifying aspects of the novel. While her deception is primarily to make others believe she is young and sensitive, seeking heart and nature, she comes to believe it herself. At first she is honest with Edith about her desire to find a rich husband for Edith. There is a marked difference between her "company" manner and her private one, just as the painted mask is removed every night to reveal "an old, worn, yellow, nodding woman, with red eyes...huddled up, like a slovenly bundle in a greasy flannel gown"(XXVII). But as Edith continues to despise the hypocrisy, Mrs. Skewton masks her own knowledge of her duplicity from herself. As she becomes insane the mask becomes real to her: "I almost wish I didn't look so young--and all that kind of thing--and then perhaps I should be more considered"(XXXVII). But even Cleopatra knows that her protestations of thankless daughters and inestimable parents is a defence against what she finally has to face, the degradation she has brought on Edith: "But sometimes, when Edith went nearer to her, and, bending down her stately head, put her cold cheek to hers, the mother would draw back as if she were afraid of her, and would fall into fits of trembling, and cry out that there was a wandering in her wits." The rose-coloured curtains never blush on a "change in the new manner of her thought and speech towards her daughter"(XXXVII).



Carker is also a deceiver, but he is not the simple "con-man" of the earlier novels. Unlike Jingle's, his motives are shown to be more complex than the usual desire for money or power. Carker's egoism leads him, like Dombey, to misjudge others. His pride in his own craft does not allow for the possibility of Edith's deception of him. That Carker is mistaken in his vision of himself is symbolized when he looks in the mirror: "There was a faint blur on the surface of the mirror in Mr. Carker's chamber, and its reflection was, perhaps, a false one. But it showed, that night, the image of a man who saw, in his fancy, a crowd of people slumbering on the ground at his feet, like the poor native at his master's door: who picked his way among them: looking down maliciously enough: but trod upon no upturned face--as yet"(XXVI). Because Carker believes he is in a commanding position he has no fear, and it is his sense of power that makes him vulnerable to the first hint of opposition. Thus when Edith reverses the roles and shows him to be a fool, he is mentally destroyed. Dickens says that Carker would have met Dombey, and "put as bold a front upon his guilt as any villain" had his knowledge of himself not been totally undermined by Edith. The basis of Carker's treachery: egoism, cowardice and the need for protection that made him the hypocritical deceiver, searching for power, is suddenly shown to him when self-deception is no longer possible. He remembers how he was motivated by jealousy and selfishness and in his awareness of his weakness he does not want to be alone, for the first time. With his knowledge of his actual powerlessness comes the realization of cowardice and a hatred more of himself than Edith. The journey home is like a vision, where only his torment is real. Carker realizes that he is responsible for his own downfall, because the meanness of his motive



allowed for no interruption of the self-deception, and his awareness makes redemption possible. "Who shall say that some weak sense of virtue upon Earth, and its reward in Heaven, did not manifest itself, even to him? If ever he remembered sister or brother with a touch of tenderness and remorse, who shall say it was not then?"(LV) Carker **dies, not** because Dickens sees him as totally evil and therefore someone who must be killed, but because he has destroyed himself by the knowledge of his actual weakness.

In contrast to the egocentric characters is Captain Cuttle. Like them he is blind to others, but his blindness derives from trust. He does not recognize Dombey's condescension when he and Walter go to borrow money, and his faith in the mutual understanding between himself and Dombey gives rise to one of the finest scenes in the novel. Similarly he trusts Carker and Rob because in his own innocence he cannot comprehend deceit. The intuitive understanding that exists between Captain Cuttle and Florence is a way of breaking through the deceptions of egocentricity. The openness of the Wooden Midshipman characters contrasts with the craft and duplicity of the Carker scenes. When Mrs. Skewton, Edith, Carker and Dombey are together they watch each other secretly, avoiding one another's eyes. While Carker understands Edith's self-humiliation, and has a power over her because the understanding is mutual, there is still much about her that he does not know. It is only when the person is not concerned with hiding his real nature both from himself and others that self-knowledge and love are possible.

Dombey and Son is the first novel in which the problem of isolation becomes a central aspect of the theme. Miller writes: "For here what is outside each person is alien and unfriendly; the protagonists





differ from the other characters only in the completeness of their isolation."<sup>10</sup> But even though the good characters find themselves in a state of isolation, it can be overcome because their lack of self-interest gives them an immediate bond with others. Thus Paul lives at Blimber's "as if he had taken life unfurnished, and the upholsterer were never coming"(XI), but his relationship with Florence, even if only the recognition of each other through the window, gives his life meaning. Similarly Florence is isolated in the huge house, shut out by her father's closed door, but she responds automatically to any affection. It is her relationship with Walter rather than with Dombey that ends Florence's isolation. Just as he found her when she was lost and alone in the city as a child, he finds her again when she is totally cut off from Dombey. Miss Tox's conversion comes when she finds herself alone with her plants and moves out of isolation to the friendliness of the Toodles. Even for Carker the problem of isolation comes when he is no longer protected from it by egoism. When Carker is the hypocritical deceiver, wrapped up in his own secret and his sense of power, he needs no one else. But with the uncovering of his self-deception and his awareness of his own weakness his first realization is the agony of loneliness. He decides to go back to England: "And if I should (this cursed fit being over), at least I shall not be alone, without a soul to speak to, or advise with, or stand by me"(LV).

Dombey comes to a similar awareness of isolation when his deception is removed. Throughout the novel Dombey's conscious desire for isolation is shown to be a part of his repression: locked up in his own pride, he is isolated even from himself. Thus he feels "shut out"





by Florence and her mother. He cannot draw close to Paul, but has to watch unrecognized, or from the isolation of his room. When he tries to understand his son by turning Paul's head to look at him, Paul turns back to his own meditation. Dombey isolates himself from his feeling for Florence by finding something to place between them, Edith.

Dombey pretends to overcome his isolation by his friendship with the Major, but because he is using Bagstock as a way of hiding his guilt about Florence, his connection with society brings no companionship. "Mr. Dombey, who had been so long shut up within himself, and who had rarely, at any time, overstepped the enchanted circle within which the operations of Dombey and Son were conducted, began to think this an improvement on his solitary life, and in place of excusing himself for another day, as he had thought of doing when alone, walked out with the major arm-in-arm"(XX). The complete isolation of Edith and Dombey is seen when they tour the gallery. "So unmatched were they, and opposed: so forced and linked together by a chain which adverse hazard and mischance had forged"(XXVII). Edith is alone at the end of the novel because of her sense of guilt. It is only when Florence lets her see her self-deception that she is able to relate to another person. Alice is in the same situation until Harriet provides a bond for her. Similarly Mr. Morfin, tied by habit to his lonely room and his 'cello, is led by his weekly watching of Harriet to enter her world and overcome the bounds of habit.

Like Carker's, it is Dombey's realization of his deception of himself that leads him to a sense of loneliness. Proud and self-sufficient in his protective armour, he believed he needed no one, but as soon as the awareness of his real nature strikes him his isolation



becomes a torment, sufficient to drive him to suicide. "But he always knew she would have loved him better now than at any other time: he was as certain that it was in her nature, as he was that there was a sky above him; and he sat thinking so, in his loneliness, from hour to hour"(LIX). And yet the solution is not an easy one. Dombey cannot go to Florence, and if he saw her he would pass her by. The self-deceiver cannot accept love as does the genuine person, and Dombey has to see their unity in order to accept it. He cannot initiate it. Thus self-deception is used as a means of isolation, but with the realization of his true situation, the deceiver has to attempt to break down his own defences against communication. It is with the use of deception as a means to isolate that Dickens is concerned in Our Mutual Friend.



### CHAPTER III

#### OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

"'We are dreadfully real, Mr. Carker,' said Mrs. Skewton; 'are we not?'" What in Dombey and Son was indicative of the falseness of one person is in Our Mutual Friend symbolic of the whole society, and just as the belief in falsity leads to corruption in Mrs. Skewton, so does the distortion of values in Our Mutual Friend lead to predation and evil. It is with the realization of deception that the sympathetic characters of Our Mutual Friend are concerned, just as the irredeemable characters are misled by what they believe to be true. Thus the problems of self-deception become both personal and general. Because people have made money mean something when it is actually valueless, they themselves have become false by their worship of it. The struggle to survive leads people like Mrs. Lammle, Bella, Charley and Eugene to deny emotion because, as Boffin says, it is impractical. The huge scope of the book examines the variations of belief in deception and reality. Bella and Eugene, the main protagonists, are led into self-deception in an effort to deny the emotions that they have been taught are less valid than the desire for money. Like other self-deceivers they come to a recognition that goodness, the only reality, lies in their own natures.

In a sense the conflict in the novel is between "Society," or the Veneering world, and the sympathetic characters who come to see it as false. But the way in which they realize the deception is by self-awareness. Thus Twemlow asserts himself against society at the end, and Mortimer realizes that Twemlow is not the voice of society because society does not really exist and therefore cannot have a voice. At





first self-deception appears to be the only way to exist in society. Thus Mr. Lammle takes away his wife's "reality" in order to keep up their pretence of wealth to the Veneerings, and Bella and Eugene seem to accept the dictates of the money ethic. But, unless the deception becomes real, as for Charley Hexam, it leads them into an awareness of their own true worth and society becomes unimportant.

One aspect of the duality that on the surface is implicit in deception is the use of doubleness in the novel. Robert Morse refers to it as a "curious device," a "principle which shapes, colors and binds this novel together no less radically than the theme of money,"<sup>1</sup> but the purpose of the "device" is not merely structural. Harmon exchanges clothes with a physical double and acquires a new name. Headstone duplicates Riderhood's clothes, and even Sloppy uses a disguise. Harmon's name is repeated in the orphan, and other characters tend to pair off: Eugene and Mortimer, Bella and Harmon, Jenny and Riah, Wegg and Venus. Headstone and Charley are loved by Miss Peecher and Mary Anne, so "there was a double palpitation among the double stocks and double wall-flowers when the master and the boy looked over the little gate"(II,1). But the most important dualities lie in the characters themselves. As Masao Miyoshi has pointed out, doubleness "bears the substantial weight of the novel: the crisis of identity by which every character exhibits some degree of duality, from duplicity and hypocrisy to a fully developed dual personality."<sup>2</sup> Jenny is both mother and daughter to Mr. Dolls. She can escape into her private world of birds and children. Fledgeby pretends to be honest by using Riah to represent his true self. Headstone's use of Riderhood's clothes is a similar attempt to give his inner nature to another person and thus rid himself



of it. The Lammles keep up a pretence of wealth to their friends. Venus pretends to be on Wegg's side, while Wegg pretends to be a literary man. Harmon has to decide whether to stay as Rokesmith the Secretary or reveal his true identity. Boffin acts out an elaborate pretence of being a miser. Only R.W. and Lizzie are totally free from any kind of deception. Of his sister Charley says "What she is, she is, and shows herself to be. There's no pretending about my sister"(II,1). R.W. is always the same. He continues to sign himself R.W. when his friends call him Rumty because the name cannot affect the man. Similarly he is the same at work as he is at home, putting a "quiet tea" between them. Being totally unselfconscious, R.W. is free from the dilemma of the other characters who see their real nature as different from the one they wish to project, or think it to be.

In Wegg are presented the problems of the major characters at a simpler level. Even he is aware of the central aspect of deception: "And herein he ranged with that very numerous class of imposters, who are quite as determined to keep up appearances to themselves as to their neighbours"(I,5). Wegg sees Boffin as totally mercenary because he himself is: "We so judge others by ourselves, that it had never come into his head before that he might not buy us up, and might prove honest, and prefer to be poor(III,7). Similarly Bella accuses Rokesmith of wanting to marry her for money, because she believes herself to be mercenary. Charley accuses Lizzie of selfishness when she refuses Headstone, because he recognizes it in his own nature but cannot face it. Wegg, like many of the other deceivers, is blind to the person he is deceiving. Just as he misunderstands Boffin so does Headstone misunderstand Riderhood. He is sure that Riderhood can be silenced by



money because he is ignorant, a judgment Headstone makes of him because of his insecure sense of his own worth. As with Carker and Edith the conner is conned because his egocentricity leads him to misjudge others. Wegg's motive is not the purely mercenary one of an early deceiver such as Jingle. "The incompetent servant, by whomsoever employed, is always against his employer"(II,7). Thus Wegg resents Boffin because of his generosity, and is jealous of the appointment of Rokesmith as secretary. While the motive is usually monetary, personal considerations are often partly responsible. Fledgeby is motivated as much by his jealousy of men's whiskers as he is by greed: "'You have a pair of whiskers, Lammle, which I never liked,' murmured Fledgeby, 'and which money can't produce... I'll bowl you down. I will, though I have no whiskers,' here he rubbed the place where they were due, 'and no manners, and no conversation!'" (III,1). He resents Eugene for the same reason: "Got a beard besides, and presumes upon it"(III,1).

In the Lammles Dickens portrays the irony of the "entrapped imposters" who have to deceive the world to hide their own deception. But even though they are equally vulnerable, equally open to ridicule if either should let slip the secret that they both married for money and neither had any, Mr. Lammle still has the upper hand. "If...he conceived the purpose of subduing his dear wife, Mrs. Alfred Lammle, by at once divesting her of any lingering reality or pretence of self-respect, the purpose would seem to have been presently executed"(I,10). Thus the Lammle's situation is not wholly comic. Because the imposters are also fighting each other they are totally isolated. After the pretence of devotion at the Podsnap's, they return home in the carriage where Mrs. Lammle "settled herself afresh in her own dark corner"(I,11).





By the end of the novel their double deception is less important than their mutual frustration: "It might have been fanciful to suppose that under their outer bearing there was something of the shamed air of two cheats who were linked together by concealed handcuffs; but not so to suppose that they were haggardly weary of one another, of themselves, and of all this world"(IV,2). It is to regain a sense of "reality" that Mrs. Lammle reveals the plot to marry Georgiana Podsnap to Fledgeby. For the first time she is able to tell an outsider her true feelings, and thus have a genuine contact with the world. At the same time she can dissociate herself from her husband by acting without his knowledge. While her motive for saving Georgiana was partly to assert her own identity, it was also out of interest for the innocent girl. Mrs. Lammle is shown to have an emotional side that has been denied in her constant struggle to appear rich. When Georgiana brings them money, Mrs. Lammle cries and is accused of being sentimental: "There is no fear of my taking any sentiment with me. I should soon be eased of it if I did. But it will be all left behind. It is all left behind. Are you ready, Alfred?"(IV,2). Mrs. Lammle's genuine nature has been touched by Georgiana, but, like Edith, fear of public opinion forces her to deny it, and the need for money makes it impractical.

Throughout the novel the influence of others is shown to be an important part of self-redemption. Just as Edith hardens when she is forced to be away from Florence, so is Mrs. Lammle hardened by the presence of Alfred. The Veneering's "friends" are emotionless because that is the condition of everyone else in the circle. Mr. Podsnap is a victim of Mr. Morfin's "habit." Never having been called upon to question his opinions, he is an extreme Dombey, able to dismiss questions of



emotion that might threaten his peace of mind by denying their existence.

Georgiana has been subjected to nothing but Podsnappery:

Miss Podsnap's early views of life being principally derived from the reflections of it [massive furniture] in her father's boots, and in the walnut and rosewood tables of the dim drawing-rooms, and in their swarthy giants of looking glasses, were of a sombre cast; and it was not wonderful that now, when she was on most days solemnly tooled through the Park by the side of her mother in a great, tall, custard-coloured phaeton, she showed above the apron of that vehicle like a dejected young person sitting up in bed to take a startled look at things in general, and very strongly desiring to get her head under the counterpane again. (I, 11)

But Georgiana immediately emphasizes her difference from her parents when she has an understanding listener: "I'm afraid you'll find me very dull. But ma talks!". Similarly Georgiana is too scared to play, but ma does. She cannot dance, but ma can; she's shy, but ma is not. She regards the hypocrisy of the social circle as "awful": "What I mean is...that ma being so endowed with awfulness, and pa being so endowed with awfulness, and there being so much awfulness everywhere--at least, everywhere where I am--perhaps it makes me, who am so deficient in awfulness...Oh, there's ma being awful with somebody with a glass in his eye!" (I, 11).

As usual Dickens shows his faith in youth, just as Bradley Headstone finds in Charley "his drudgery lightened by communication with a brighter and more apprehensive spirit than his own" (IV, 7). That Georgiana can be a product of Podsnappery, raised in it, and still see it for what it is, suggests that Dickens was not afraid of Podsnap as Edmund Wilson has said.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Dickens' concern throughout the novel with the young and their ability to break free from the influence of their parents is a significant factor in the optimistic tone that critics ignore. For example, Pleasant Riderhood has been brought up to regard life in general as a fight, occasioned by continual rough treatment from her father. And yet she has a touch of romance, and hopes



that her father will revive from his drowning a kinder man. Lizzie stays with her father because she knows that she can influence him but she is in no way degraded herself by his occupation. In fact it is her training on the river that allows her to save Eugene. As so often occurs in Dickens, the personality, not the object, gives that object its significance. Thus in Dombey and Son the train is symbolic of Death in the eyes of only Mr. Dombey and Carker. For Toodle it is a source of income. Lizzie realizes that it is more important for her to retain her father's love than to leave him to follow her own ambitions:

There am I, continuing with father and holding to father, because father loves me, and I love father. I can't so much as read a book, because, if I had learned, father would have thought I was deserting him, and I should have lost my influence. I have not the influence I want to have. I cannot stop some dreadful things I try to stop, but I go on in the hope and trust that the time will come. In the meanwhile I know that I am in some things a stay to father, and that, if I was not faithful to him, he would--in revenge-like, or in disappointment, or both--go wild or bad! (I,3)

Charley is also influenced by Lizzie. His selfishness grows when he is away from her, and it is only when she is there that he reverts to his childhood kindness: "Some touch of compunction smote the boy's hardening heart as he looked upon her, his patient little nurse in infancy, his patient friend, adviser, and reclamer in boyhood, the self-forgetting sister who had done everything for him. His tone relented, and he drew her arm through his"(II,15). When Charley is under no influence, having left Lizzie and only just met Headstone, he tends towards his sister, despite Headstone's attempt to sway him by playing on his ambition. "His confidence in her sat more easily upon him than the indecision with which he had twice contended. It was his better nature to be true to her, if it were his worse nature to be wholly selfish. And as yet the better nature had the stronger hold"(II,1). Headstone's power over





Charley is much like Miss Wade's power over Tattycoram, but Charley never comes to a realization of his self-deception. Under the influence of Headstone his selfishness crushes his old love for Lizzie, and when he finally turns the master's aid against him, it is with his own fault that he accuses him: "And why have you done it? Because, Mr. Headstone, you are in all your passions so selfish, and so concentrated upon yourself, that you have not bestowed one proper thought on me" (IV,7). Like Fledgeby, Charley is able to protect himself from self-criticism by attributing his worse nature to others and righteously pretending to be good. At first he is made to realize what he is doing by Lizzie's patient acceptance:

"I tell you what," said the boy then, bursting out into angry whimpering. "You're a selfish jade, and you think there's not enough for three of us, and you want to get rid of me."

"If you believe so, Charley--yes, then I believe too that I am a selfish jade, and that I think there's not enough for three of us, and that I want to get rid of you."

It was only when the boy rushed at her, and threw his arm round her neck, that she lost her self-restraint. (I,6)

When Headstone feeds his selfishness by accusing Lizzie of holding him back, Charley wants to agree, but his better nature makes him support his sister. Finally, Charley's uncertain sense of persecution becomes an undisputed conviction. Thus the stifling of conscience is as real a result of self-deception as is the awakening. Although Charley's desire for success was caused by the dictate of society that makes the characters in the novel ambitious, he is unable to be reformed from selfishness like Martin Chuzzlewit because he has convinced himself that he has been mistreated. Like Miss Wade, the deception becomes the reality, and by believing in the false ethics of society a person can become corrupt.

The theme of selfishness is explored in the novel in other characters also: "What is there but self for selfishness to see behind



it?"(IV,7). Charley sees everything as it relates to him, as do Wegg and Bella before she completely renounces herself for Harmon. Mrs. Boffin accuses herself of selfishness in choosing an orphan, rather than acting for the good of the child. Headstone's selfish love for Lizzie is contrasted at the end with Eugene's self-denying love. Headstone uses Riderhood to avenge himself on Eugene, despite the fact that Riderhood would have had Lizzie's father accused of murder. Eugene denies his desire for revenge for Lizzie's sake by not accusing Headstone. It is this selfless action that drives Headstone insane. The denial of self implies not a submissive attitude but a certain integrity, as was shown in Paul and Florence. Thus Bella's father is free to listen without comment, to give his daughter away without fear of losing her, as Gaffer cannot. Much of the humour of the novel is provided by scenes between R.W. and his family, and his ability to stay out of the continual family argument becomes a characteristic of Bella also, as she progresses away from self-consciousness.

"Can you think of your daughter Bella, and sleep?" she disdainfully inquired.

To which he mildly answered, "Yes, I think I can, my dear."

"Then," said Mrs. Wilfer with solemn indignation, "I would recommend you, if you have a human feeling, to retire to bed."

"Thank you, my dear," he replied; "I think it is the best place for me." And with these unsympathetic words very gladly withdrew. (IV,5)

At first it seems as though Jenny Wren has a double nature, or is trying to deceive herself about her true situation. She regards her father as a child, and travels between airy visions and the harsh reality of her life as a doll's dressmaker. And yet Jenny's vision are the reality. Her conception of the "He" who is coming to marry her is a true expression of her hopes, just as her visions of children and flowers are a totally real part of her experience. "Jenny Wren had her



personal vanities--happily for her--and no intentions were stronger in her breast than the various trials and torments that were, in the fulness of time, to be inflicted upon 'him' "(II,2). Similarly Lizzie calls her visions in the fire the "real world." For the sympathetic characters reality is to be found in their own imagination. Eugene realizes this when he asks for Jenny to come to his death-bed. The role reversal of Jenny and her father is seen by most critics as an example of the doubleness theme, just as Bella treats her father like a brother. J. Hillis Miller says that by transforming the real situation into a fictive one the character can free himself from the "steady pressure" of reality.<sup>4</sup> But in a certain sense Jenny is a mother to Mr. Dolls. The reality of her situation lies in her having to look after him, as though he were a child. Her real identity is not changed, just as Bella's attitude to her father is a natural one. Similarly Mrs. Boffin's desire for "Society" is not a role, but is a part of what she thinks she should do. But it makes no difference to her character and is entered into with no attempt at making herself anything other than what she is. Mrs. Boffin's "fashion" extends no further than a black velvet hat with feathers, and the contrast is made with Mrs. Podsnap who genuinely believes herself to be "fashionable."

Bradley Headstone has been called a dual personality, but he is in fact a much more complex character than that, as is his successor in The Mystery of Edwin Drood. Each side of the dual personality is unaware of the existence of the other, and consequently there is no conflict present in the person's mind. Headstone, on the other hand, is tormented by his self-knowledge. In fact there is really no split personality at all. He has no "good" side, as Dickens makes clear from his first





appearance. "There was a kind of settled trouble in his face"(II,1). He appears to be uncomfortable in his "decent" clothes, and "the habit of questioning and being questioned had given him a suspicious manner, or a manner that would be better described as one of lying in wait"(II,1). When he and Charley visit Lizzie he is uneasy, and Dickens adds, "But he never was quiet"(II,1).

Headstone's self-deception can be seen as the next stage in Miss Wade's situation. Like her he has a distorted vision of other people, thinking that they belittle him because he himself is conscious of his pauper upbringing. But in a sense he is closer to Dostoyevsky's self-tormentor in Notes from Underground. Miss Wade has not reached the point where her torment is pleasurable, whereas Headstone has: "The state of the man was murderous, and he knew it. More; he irritated it with a kind of perverse pleasure akin to that which a sick man sometimes has in irritating a wound upon his body"(III,11). Similarly he pursues Eugene, knowing that he does it to torment himself. The underground man writes: "I got to the point of feeling a sort of secret abnormal, despicable enjoyment...acutely conscious that that day I had committed a loathsome action again, that what was done could never be undone, and secretly, inwardly gnawing, gnawing at myself for it, tearing and consuming myself till at last the bitterness turned into a sort of shameful accursed sweetness, and at last--into positive enjoyment! Yes, into enjoyment, into enjoyment! I insist upon that."<sup>5</sup> In both cases the sense of inferiority leads to total egocentricity. "And the worst of it is, he himself, his very own self, looks on himself as a mouse; no one asks him to do so; and that is an important point."<sup>6</sup> Unlike Miss Wade, Headstone realizes that his torment is self-initiated, and because,



like the underground man, he knows that he belittles himself without being asked, he is open to the subtle attack of Eugene and the craftiness of Riderhood. He continually refers to his torment: "Oh, what a misfortune is mine that I cannot so control myself as to appear a stronger creature than this, when a man who has not felt in all his life what I have felt in a day can so command himself!"(II,6). When Harmon goes to him to try and reach Lizzie and find a teacher for Sloppy, Headstone cannot leave Wrayburn's name alone, despite Harmon's attempts to change the subject. When Lizzie refuses to marry him, he repeats Wrayburn's name almost unconsciously, and without being able to withhold it.

Headstone is irredeemable because he believes in the distortion that people think little of him. By believing in unreality he is not aware of possible good, and his love for Lizzie becomes a jealous passion. In a sense his position is like that of Pip, but Pip is saved by the continual knowledge that he is deceiving himself, that Estella's disparagement is meaningless because he knows his own worth. Redemption comes only through the denial of self, but for Headstone the need to protect the self has resulted in a blinding egocentricity. Thus he cannot accept that Lizzie might not love him, so he assumes that there is a rival even though she denies it. His lack of interest in anything other than his own conflict makes him susceptible to Riderhood's method of drawing him out, just as Bella's self-interest led her to divulge secrets to Mrs. Lammle. Similarly it does not occur to him that Riderhood might bribe him. Headstone had been so determined to make Riderhood an accomplice that he cannot see him as a pursuer.

Ironically, Headstone's first torment is caused by Charley's selfish renunciation of him, as he was the one person in whom he felt



a partly unselfish interest. The feeling of utter isolation that he feels now is emphasized by his meeting with Mr. Milvey at the station. When he passes out from the news that Eugene and Lizzie are married, the style of the passage sets him off as totally alone, the object of slight notice but no sympathy: "He was took very bad to be sure, and was biting and knocking about him (the man said) furiously. Would the gentleman give him his card, as he had seen him first? The gentleman did so, with the explanation that he knew no more of the man attacked than that he was a man of a very respectable occupation, who had said he was out of health, as his appearance would of itself have indicated. The attendant received the card, watched his opportunity for sliding down, slid down, and so it ended"(IV,11). Headstone's final torment is the realization that he brought Lizzie and Eugene together, and that by acting totally selflessly Eugene has ignored Headstone's existence.

Headstone's situation suggests an interesting aspect of self-deception. The deception appears to be the result of a distortion of what was true in a limited sense. Self-deception arises through the generalizing of a small, but true, event. Thus Eugene does belittle Headstone, as other people may have done, but Headstone has developed the slight into a general feeling of disparagement. He thinks that Eugene is laughing at his low birth, when actually Eugene knows nothing about it. Similarly Miss Wade is partially correct in her view of her benefactors. Like the Meagles, the guardians of Tattycoram, Miss Wade's guardians were sometimes condescending. But Miss Wade builds upon the limited truth and it becomes a distortion.

Bella Wilfer's self-deception is one of the main subjects of the novel. Barbara Hardy sees Bella's conversion as the result of Boffin's





example, or the moral double. "The central moral crisis in Our Mutual Friend, the conversion of Bella from mercenariness to love, shows Dickens' precise awareness of this kind of moral therapy. For Boffin and his wife deliberately act out the homeopathic cure, staging her mercenary values and repelling her into the right course."<sup>7</sup> But as with Mr. Dombey the characterization is subtle and shows a growing development rather than a sudden change occasioned only by Boffin's trick. As Miller says, "Dickens remains true to his feeling that each man or woman has a fixed nature, a selfhood which may be obscured or distorted but never essentially altered."<sup>8</sup>

When Bella first talks about the Harmon will, how she had been left to John Harmon who had subsequently died, she claims to love money, and want it "dreadfully." But her first objection to the will is to the idea of being deprived of any free will, of the ability to mutually choose and be chosen: "It was ridiculous enough to know what an embarrassing meeting it would be, and how we never could pretend to have an inclination of our own, either of us. It was ridiculous enough to know I shouldn't like him--how could I like him, left to him in a will, like a dozen of spoons, with everything cut and dried beforehand, like orange chips?"(I,4). Further proof of her lack of true mercenariness is her reaction to her father's statement that money and goods are the best references:

"Do you think they are the best, pa?" asked Miss Bella in a low voice, and without looking over her shoulder, as she warmed her foot on the fender.

"Among the best, my dear."

"I should have thought, myself, it was so easy to add the usual kind of one," said Bella with a toss of her curls. (I,4)

At this point Bella's mercenariness is part of a defence against Lavvy,



her sister, and Mrs. Wilfer: she is provoked into outrageous statements by their continual arguing. The Wilfer women engage in a constant verbal battle, the object of which is to contradict immediately what the others say. Mrs. Wilfer turns it into a martyrdom: "It is as you think, R.W., not as I do." Lavvy inevitably rejects her mother's assumed conciliation by taking the opposite position:

"In short, ma," said Lavvy, bouncing over to the enemy without a word of notice, "you must know very well...that Mr. and Mrs. Boffin are just absolute perfection."...

"Unfortunate Lavvy! cried Mrs. Wilfer in a tone of commiseration. "She always comes in for it. My poor child!" But Lavvy, with the suddenness of her former desertion, now bounced over to the other enemy; very sharply remarking, "Don't patronize me, ma, because I can take care of myself."(II,8)

Lavinia has the same effect on Bella:

"You never cared for George Sampson, Bella."

"And did I say I did, miss?"...

"You were rude enough to him," Lavinia again interposed.

"And did I say I wasn't, miss?" (I,4)

Thus Bella is forced to assume attitudes that she does not necessarily hold in order to combat her sister's remarks. That she is used to doing so is shown by her conversation with R.W.: "'I am sure,' said she, 'though you have no feeling for me, pa, I am one of the most unfortunate girls that ever lived....And yet you don't feel for me.--Yes, you do, yes, you do'"(I,4). Being used to making such statements to her mother and sister, she automatically treats her father in the same way, but the natural honesty that she sees in his face brings her back from her defensive position of self-pity to her real awareness of the mutual sympathy that she and her father share. In a sense the conversations and attitudes of the Wilfer women are as deceptive as those of "society." Thus Bella comes to see that she is being deluded by false social values and at the same time sees the effect that her mother's attitude has on



her. Like R.W., she has to learn to see it for what it is, and not allow herself to be led into self-deception.

The power of the honest person to confound the deceiver is seen in other situations in the novel. Lizzie's honesty in the face of Charley's accusations of selfishness causes him to change as radically as Bella did. Riah's quiet assurance temporarily rattles the smooth-talking Fledgeby:

"Your people need speak the truth sometimes, for they lie enough," remarked Fascination Fledgeby.

"Sir, there is," returned the old man with quiet emphasis, "too much untruth among all denominations of men." Rather dashed, Fascination Fledgeby took another scratch at his intellectual head with his hat, to gain time for rallying. (II,5)

Another aspect of Bella's avarice can be seen in the first Wilfer family scene. Bella is romantic about the new lodger, Mr. Rokesmith. "'Pa,' said Bella, 'we have got a Murderer for a tenant'"(I,4). To her statement "'Pa, mark my words! Between Mr. Rokesmith and me there is a natural antipathy and a deep distrust; and something will come of it!'" R.W. replies "'My dear, and girls, between Mr. Rokesmith and me there is a matter of eight sovereigns, and something for supper shall come of it, if you'll agree upon the article.'" R.W.'s realistic approach to the monetary aspects of having a lodger shows Bella to be a romantic girl, viewing Rokesmith as a hopeful source of excitement. Her desire for money is later shown to be a similarly romantic idea, a fiction that makes a dull life more bearable. Throughout the novel it is R.W. who can restore Bella to faith in her true nature.

Bella's interest in Rokesmith that begins as a romantic "antipathy" becomes in their next meeting a genuine interest: "Now, Bella suspected by this time that Mr. Rokesmith admired her. Whether the knowledge (for





it was rather that than a suspicion) caused her to incline to him a little more, or a little less, than she had done at first; whether it rendered her eager to find out more about him, because she sought to establish reason for her distrust, or because she sought to free him from it; was as yet dark to her own heart. But at most times he occupied a great amount of her attention, and she had set her attention closely on this incident"(I,9). Of course the last sentence contradicts the suggestion that at this point only Bella knows her real conflict. Because she likes him but will not admit it he is able to undermine her pretended disinterestedness and disdain:

"Those are worthy people, Miss Wilfer."

"Do you know them well?" asked Bella.

He smiled, reproaching her, and she coloured, reproaching herself--both, with the knowledge that she had meant to entrap him into an answer not true--when he said, "I know of them."

"Truly, he told us he had seen you but once."

"Truly, I supposed he did."

Bella was nervous now, and would have been glad to recall her question.(I,9).

It is because Bella knows that she is attempting to present a certain image of herself that she fails in trying to gain a superiority over Rokesmith. Knowing that he is a threat to her outward calm, Bella attempts to shut him out as she does Lavinia by contradicting everything he says. When he asks her about her book, she says she does not want it any more. Unlike Lavinia, the Secretary knows how to counter the device by not answering her.

"I am as wise as ever," said Miss Bella loftily, "for I don't know what a Secretary is. Not that it signifies."

"Not at all."

A covert glance at her face, as he walked beside her, showed him that she had not expected his ready assent to that proposition. (I,16)

She tries to keep the upper hand by forcing a reply with "I don't understand you" and "you ought to know best how you speculated upon it,"



but again Rokesmith does not succumb to her manipulation and fails to reply. Bella's attempt to protect herself from Rokesmith's understanding of her real nature is similar to that of her mother. Mrs. Wilfer has to have the advantage in any conversation. Thus when Rokesmith seems to anticipate her, she has to prove him wrong:

"Pardon me," returned Mrs. Wilfer with dreadful solemnity, "but I had not finished."

"Pray excuse me."

"I was about to say," pursued Mrs. Wilfer, who clearly had not had the faintest idea of saying anything more, "that when I use the term attraction, I do so with the qualification that I do not mean it in any way whatever." (I,16)

Realizing that she uses the same device herself, Bella cannot tolerate it in her mother. She immediately crosses her by insisting that her love, not compliments, be sent to the Boffins.

Rokesmith assesses Bella as "so insolent, so trivial, so capricious, so mercenary, so careless, so hard to touch, so hard to turn!" (I,16). Yet her nervousness at the ability of Rokesmith not to be deceived by her insolence, and her honesty with her father suggest that she is "hard to touch" because she is afraid of herself. She assumes carelessness and changeableness to avoid introspection or the closeness of Rokesmith's understanding. In a sense her mercenariness, which is shown to be present by an "ambitious triumph" in her face, is a romantic idea fed by Rokesmith, the Boffins and even her father. It is at Rokesmith's suggestion that the Boffins will support her financially that she shows a mercenary bent. Used to being called the "lovely woman," Bella has been brought up to see money, or possessions, as something of which she has been deprived. As Dickens says later, she has been spoilt by poverty as well as by wealth. Similarly old Harmon's praise of her temper as a child has led her to think of her wilfulness as an asset.



The growth of Bella's love for Harmon is expressed with great subtlety, almost in a feminine way. "'An invaluable man is Rokesmith,' said Mr. Boffin, after some two or three months. 'But I can't quite make him out.' Neither could Bella, so she found the subject rather interesting"(II,8). When she hears that he is jealous of Lightwood, or so she thinks, she is disdainful, partly because he is her father's lodger: "Rather cool in a Secretary--and pa's lodger--to make me the subject of his jealousy!"(II,8). The Secretary is in the same relationship to R.W. as the latter is to his own landlord, whom Bella had previously claimed to hate because he had a financial hold over her father. As with many people who assume a governing position having been governed, she feels a sense of superiority. Dickens suggests that her disdain is also a part of her new-found wealth: "Yet it was not so very long ago that Bella had been flattered by the discovery that this same Secretary and lodger seemed to like her. Ah! but the eminently respectable aristocratic mansion and Mrs. Boffin's dressmaker had not come into play then"(II,8). But Bella's love for money is shown to be a means of self-deception as well as the natural result of what she is constantly being told by her conversation with the "hated" Rokesmith. By being totally honest with her he breaks through her facade of contempt and makes her reply simply and honestly. When he leaves she feels penitent. She also tells him that she is planning to visit her parents the next day, even though, as she admits to herself afterwards, she had no previous intention of doing so. She does not change her mind out of wilfulness as she used to, however, but because Rokesmith has touched her genuine nature. His honesty and real concern for her draws out her own honesty, just as Lizzie could have a similar effect on Charley. But Bella is





still uncertain of her position, replying instinctively to Rokesmith's honesty rather than with a conscious knowledge that she cares for him. Thus when she thinks about the incident later she protects herself from a true recognition of his power: "He has no right to any power over me, and how do I come to mind him when I don't care for him?"(II,8). The change in her is noticeable when she goes home. Now she does not enter into the verbal games of her mother and sister. Unable to pretend as she did before, "Bella really stood in natural need of a little help, and she got none." Her mother's ridiculous speeches raise only an honest defence of the Boffins in Bella, and she sees their usual conversations as exercises in unkindness: "' I don't want to speak of them here,' replied Bella, suppressing indignation, and tapping her foot on the floor. 'They are much too kind and too good to be drawn into these discussions'"(II,8).

When Bella takes her father for lunch she makes her first open avowal of mercenariness, but the spirit of her declaration is a romantic and almost comic one. Her father's responses show that he does not believe her, and Bella's words show that she is more concerned with providing interest than with genuinely worrying about her nature.

"And now, pa," pursued Bella, "I'll make a confession to you. I am the most mercenary little wretch that ever lived in the world."

"I should hardly have thought it of you, my dear," returned her father, first glancing at himself, and then at the dessert.

"I understand what you mean, pa, but it's not that. It's not that I care for money to keep as money, but I do care so much for what it will buy!"

"Really I think most of us do," returned R.W.

"But not to the dreadful extent that I do, pa. O-oh!" cried Bella, screwing the exclamation out of herself with a twist of her dimpled chin. "I AM so mercenary!"

With a wistful glance R.W. said, in default of having anything better to say: "About when did you begin to feel it coming on, my dear?"(II,8)

Bella's attitude throughout is that of the actress, delighting in a



pretence that she knows her father does not really believe, and that she would like to believe herself. At one point Dickens describes her as "nodding at him, with her very pretty eyebrows raised as high as they would go, and looking comically frightened." Bella is enjoying her idea of herself, and sees it as a way of avoiding Rokesmith's love for her, and her love for him. But her father is the touchstone of her real nature, and she relies on his not really believing her. When it seems as though he might she abruptly changes the subject. That evening she sees the duality of her thoughts when she wishes first that the will had never been made and then that she could have married John Harmon: "'Contradictory things to wish,' said Bella, 'but my life and fortunes are so contradictory altogether that what can I expect myself to be?'" (II,8).

When Rokesmith finally proposes it is to his manner that she principally objects. She believes that he ingratiated himself with the Boffins in order to marry her, and again she resents the inference that she has no will of her own: "And was it not enough that I should have been willed away like a horse, or a dog, or a bird; but must you, too, begin to dispose of me in your mind, and speculate in me as soon as I had ceased to be the talk and the laugh of the town? Am I for ever to be made the property of strangers?"(II,13). She apologizes to him immediately, admitting that she is spoilt and inexperienced, but Dickens makes the reason for her change of heart purposely ambiguous. She relents in a "wilful inconsistent" way. While "inconsistent" implies the conflict between her role and her true nature, "wilful" suggests that she relented, not so much because she was dropping the role, but because she was deliberately contradicting his impression of her. Unwilling to give up



her pretence of mercenariness, she does not wish Rokesmith to understand her. After her refusal Bella is at odds with herself, calls herself a dragon and then wishes her father were there to talk about "an avaricious marriage." That she regards her mercenary ambition as something apart from her indicates that she recognizes it as a defence, but one that she believes in more strongly as other people threaten her. The Boffins emphasize their monetary obligation to her, and Rokesmith reminds her of it. Lavinia and Mrs. Wilfer have no real contact with her at all, so her only refuge is in her father. Thus when she accepts her true nature it is to her father that she goes.

When Rokesmith walks to work with R.W. the next day, Bella's father says that Bella is ambitious, and will marry fortune. But he has been caught up in Bella's romantic idea of wealth and sees it in terms of the ships coming up the river. He describes himself in his old clothes with one new article as being like an African king who is brought to England and dressed in only one English hat or pair of braces while the rest of his attire is native. His comic vision allows him to see Bella's ambition as a romantic ideal, part of the "lovely woman" secret that lets him escape from Mrs. Wilfer and Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles. But the ideal does not obscure her real feelings from him, as it does for Bella herself. When she tells him that Rokesmith proposed to her, he sees no reason for her refusal:

Pa answered quietly with the counter-question, "What did you say to that, my love?"

"I said No," returned Bella sharply. "Of course."

"Yes. Of course," said her father, meditating. (III,4)

Pa does not take it as course, and neither does Bella, but in convincing him she hopes to convince herself. When Pa suggests that the fact that





she does not care for Lightwood is enough reason not to marry him, Bella tries to convince him again of her avarice which he refuses to believe seriously: "'No, pa, it's not enough,' rejoined Bella, giving him another shake or two. 'Haven't I told you what a mercenary little wretch I am?'"(III,4).

Mr. Boffin's pretence is of interest to Bella primarily because of Rokesmith. It is his face she watches, his reaction she looks for. And yet while she immediately despises Boffin's miserliness it also makes her feel that her own mercenariness is real: "And yet I have money always in my thoughts and my desires, and the whole life I place before myself is money, money, money, and what money can make of life!" (III,4). Having denied her love for Rokesmith, she has to accept the romance as actual in order to prove to herself that she made the right decision, but with the working out of Boffin's deception she sees the romance as false and her love as the only truth. She sees the duality as inconsistent, because she cannot reconcile her hatred for Boffin's miserliness with what she believes to be her own mercenary nature.

Bella realizes the falsity into which she has been led by her self-deception when she befriends Mrs. Lammle. Although she mistrusts her, her wilfulness makes her ignore the fact, and as usual she uses her pretence of avarice to shock and to keep the upper hand. Like Lavinia and Rokesmith, Mrs. Lammle can use Bella's fear of honesty to provoke her into false statements: "Now the very grossness of this flattery put Bella upon proving that she actually did please inspite of herself. She had a misgiving that she was doing wrong...but she went on with her confidence"(III,5). As with her father, Bella reinforces her own belief in her avarice by proving it to Mrs. Lammle, but she is



now fully aware of the falseness of her assertions, if not of her true feelings. "Why am I always at war with myself? Why have I told, as if upon compulsion, what I knew all along I ought to have withheld? Why am I making a friend of this woman beside me, in spite of the whispers against her that I hear in my heart?"(III,5) Because Mrs. Lammle represents "society" to Bella, she thinks that she should adopt society's values of money being all-important and emotion impractical, in order to impress her. But Bella recognizes the falsity of her attitude now.

Bella does not appear again for a considerable time, and when she does her "war" has brought her to see the wrongness of her pretended insolence, and the futility of verbal battles. When she and Rokesmith meet at Betty Higden's funeral it is Bella who wants to be open and talk on "equal terms." Bewildered at finding her mercenary pretence crumbling because of Mr. Boffin, she defends Rokesmith against him but cannot admit to any feelings of love. To avoid the subject she disparages herself: "I know quite enough of myself...and I don't improve upon acquaintance" (III,9). When she meets Lizzie, Dickens describes Bella's nature as "giddy for want of the weight of some sustaining purpose, and capricious because it was always fluttering among little things." Unlike Lizzie she has never had to care for a father or brother. Because everyone else pampered her she began to pamper herself and believe in ideals that were never really true to her nature. Rokesmith did not need her support until Boffin attacked him. It is Lizzie who radically affects Bella, however, by showing her the existence of unselfish love. "Does a woman's heart...seek to gain anything?" Bella's reaction is a spirited one as she says to herself "There, you little mercenary wretch! Do you hear that? Ain't you ashamed of yourself?" The suggestion of an alternative to an



"avaricious marriage" brings about Bella's acceptance of her true nature. For the first time she does not contradict Rokesmith's words, and she takes his arm.

Bella's total enlightenment comes with the confrontation, when Mr. Boffin fires Rokesmith for proposing to Bella. When she hears Boffin saying exactly what she had said to her father, she is able to see it objectively and realize that she had been deceiving herself. Because she has harmed Rokesmith, the mercenary front becomes hateful to her; before it was a harmless game, a way for Bella and her father to have secret dreams. Bella's style throughout the tirade is the same as it always was, because she has not changed. Her harangue is both spirited and relenting, but there is no division now in her mind. Ironically Boffin says that love is romantic and mercenariness is practical, whereas for Bella the reverse is true. It is her love that makes her leave the Boffin's in her old clothes and return to the everyday world of her father's office. Her married life consists of such ordinary tasks as would be found in *The Complete British Family Housewife*. Bella's sense of self-assurance after the confrontation can be seen in her visit to her mother. By talking constantly she prevents her mother or Lavvy from interposing any condescending or critical word.

Eugene Wrayburn is the other major protagonist of the novel. Like Bella he has been led to believe in the dictates of society, although his connection with it is from a different source. The son of a socially ambitious father, Eugene finds himself a lawyer, and a part of the Veneering group, without wanting to be in that position. But until he can find a substitute for the falseness which he sees around him, he can only criticize it idly, and without purpose. That Eugene is in





part bound up by the attitudes of society can be seen in his struggle to assert his real nature. His father's beliefs return to him throughout his development, and are still a factor when the final crisis of identity comes. Like Bella, Eugene goes from a state of boredom and emotional isolation to love, and the growth to self-awareness of the two characters provides a solution to the central problem of the novel.

Like Bella, Eugene has been threatened with an arranged marriage, and for the first time he asserts himself against M.R.F., "my respected father." While his manner of speaking is witty in its apparent sense of the ridiculous, what he says often shows a sense of dissatisfaction that is more than the idle patter of a bored young lawyer. His first reflection is that life on a lighthouse could be interesting because "a monotony defined with that precision, and limited to that extent, might...be more endurable than the unlimited monotony of one's fellow-creatures"(I,12).

That Eugene's careless exterior is in part a defence is seen at his first encounter with Lizzie. He watches her through the window as she sits at her fire, waiting for Gaffer to return. Mortimer notices that he is more ridiculous than usual: "It passed into Mortimer Lightwood's mind that a change of some sort, best expressed, perhaps, as an intensification of all that was wildest and most negligent and reckless in his friend, had come upon him in the last half-hour or so. Thoroughly used to him as he was, he found something new and strained in him that was for the moment perplexing"(I,8). When Riderhood threatens Lizzie, Eugene leaps to her defence with a fierceness that astonishes Lightwood. Taylor Stoeher in The Dreamer's Stance believes Eugene when he tells Mortimer that he went for a walk, but the hints of his interest are



quite sufficient to show that Lizzie was his first thought when her father was discovered drowned. That Eugene is more ridiculous after his vision of Lizzie weeping, and does not tell Mortimer that he went to see her, is indicative of a defence that he develops, to hide his emotions from both himself and other people.

Eugene is a mixture of cruelty and kindness when he offers to get a teacher for Lizzie. Knowing her gentle and unselfish nature he makes use of the power he has over her, and Dickens emphasizes the cruelty which is a part of his complacency. He has a "passing" appearance of earnestness and unselfish interest. When Jenny thinks he is referring to her infirmity, he is "Shocked--to do him justice." But he also replies "very, very kindly" when Lizzie cries because she thinks she is unworthy of his generosity, and he tells Jenny Wren that he does not reform because there is no one to make it worth his while. His thoughts about Lizzie are carefully guarded, both by himself and Dickens.

Mortimer notices Eugene's many absences from their boating trip, and asks Eugene what he is withholding and if there is a new subject of interest in his mind. Eugene replies "At times I have thought yes; at other other times I have thought no. Now I have been inclined to pursue such a subject; now I have felt that it was absurd, and that it tired and embarrassed me. Absolutely, I can't say. Frankly and faithfully, I would if I could"(II,6). While Mortimer accepts the answer, he still suspects Eugene of an interest in Lizzie and hopes that there will be "nothing injurious to you, Eugene, or--!". Eugene appears to understand the reference, because he stops Mortimer from continuing and uses a casual game of shooting pieces of earth across the road to assume a carelessness. But Mortimer says that he does not know to whom he was





referring, and Eugene "looked at his friend inquiringly and a little suspiciously. There was no concealed or half-expressed meaning in his face"(II,6). Either Eugene's mask is perfect or he really does not consider his relationship with Lizzie a serious one. The first possibility would appear to be the correct one, however. When Headstone and Charley arrive at this point, Eugene never takes his eyes off the schoolmaster except when Lizzie is mentioned. "For a mere moment Wrayburn turned his eyes aside from the schoolmaster to note the effect of the last word on Mortimer, who, standing on the opposite side of the fire, as soon as the word was spoken, turned his face towards the fire, and looked down into it"(II,6). Eugene has a fixed idea of what he is, and the image is one he wishes to have others believe:

You must take your friend as he is. You know what I am, my dear Mortimer. You know how dreadfully susceptible I am to boredom. You know that when I became enough of a man to find myself an embodied conundrum, I bored myself to the last degree by trying to find out what I meant. You know that at length I gave it up, and declined to guess any more. Then how can I possibly give you the answer that I have not discovered? The old nursery form runs, "Riddle-me-riddle-me-ree, p'raps you can't tell me what this may be?" My reply runs, "No. Upon my life, I can't. (II,6)

If Eugene's appearance of thoughtlessness is increased to avoid the growth of stronger emotions, caused by Lizzie, Headstone's attitude serves to reinforce the front. Headstone's violent emotion is a test of Eugene's coolness, and Eugene inevitably wins. When Headstone accuses Eugene, quite falsely, of reproaching him for his upbringing, Eugene remarks when he leaves, "The man seems to believe that everybody was acquainted with his mother!"(II,6).

Lizzie thinks that Eugene's failings derive from the same source as Bella's, through his "being like one cast away, for the want of something to trust in, and care for, and think well of"(II,11). Unfortunately





it is Lizzie's trust and devotion that causes Eugene to drift on without examining how he feels about her. When he meets Riah and Lizzie after Headstone's proposal, the knowledge that Lizzie fears for his safety gives him a sense of power. "He knew that she would not insist upon his leaving her. He knew that, her fears for him being aroused, she would be uneasy if he were out of her sight. For all his seeming levity and carelessness, he knew whatever he chose to know of the thoughts of her heart"(II,15). The incident reminds him of Mortimer's questions about his purpose and intent, and he answers himself with "we shall soon know now." While the knowledge of Lizzie's love has stirred Eugene to a decision, it is still unclear whether he means to use his power over her, or whether he is willing to recognize the emotion that prompted him to comfort her after the loss of her father, and protect her name from the insults of Charley and Riderhood. Unfortunately Eugene is used to fooling people with his assumed carelessness, and even Mortimer believes that his friend is ridiculous and thoughtless. In fact the comic aspect of Eugene's manner is one reason why Mortimer likes him. Thus at this point Eugene seems to be falling a victim to his pride in his casual exterior, and his belief in his lack of emotion makes the sense of power a desirable one. It is only when he learns that Lizzie has acted independently by disappearing that he realizes the possible falsity of his sense of power.

When Eugene tries to find out Lizzie's address from Jenny Wren, the conflict in each of them is compared through language. They use harsh or careless words to cover their real feelings. Thus Jenny hides her emotion by hurling a constant barrage of insults at her father, but when he leaves she weeps behind her hand. As Eugene watches, "he was



sorry, but his sympathy did not move his carelessness to do anything but feel sorry"(III,10). Used to considering himself idle and thoughtless, he does not actively respond to the emotion he feels, just as he uses the same self-deception to turn his growing love for Lizzie into something that at first cannot be, and then a selfish adjunct of his idea of himself. Just as Bella enjoys being thought avaricious, Eugene enjoys his assumed carelessness. It is when an awareness of love begins to undermine their impression that a conflict arises. After failing to persuade Jenny, Eugene meets Mortimer who suggests to him that he does not really care for Lizzie. For the first time Eugene is serious about his feelings: "I don't know that. I must ask you not to say that, as if we took it for granted"(III,10). When he tries to joke about it, he does so "with a perplexed and inquisitive face, as if he actually did not know what to make of himself." While he evades Mortimer's questions by his usual casualness, Mortimer is not convinced this time that it is genuine: "Lightwood was shaking his head over the air with which his friend held forth thus--an air so whimsically open and argumentative as almost to deprive what he said of the appearance of evasion." The qualification "almost" shows that Eugene's carelessness is in part assumed now. He seems to resent his friend's questions because he is troubled himself by the conflict within him. When Eugene and Mortimer lead Headstone on a chase through London, Mortimer is astonished that "so careless a man could be so wary, and that so idle a man could take so much trouble"(III,10).

When Eugene goes to see Lizzie he is disillusioned. He knows that his pretence at carelessness cannot protect him from true feeling, and he can no longer simplify his life by striking a pose of indifference.



Looking at some sheep grazing he says, "You are stupid enough, I suppose. But, if you are clever enough to get through life tolerably to your satisfaction, you have got the better of me, Man as I am, and Mutton as you are!"(IV,6). Thus when he meets Lizzie he assumes a carelessness because he still cannot accept his love for her.

"I can't go away."

"Why not?"

"Faith!" said Eugene in his airily candid manner. "Because you won't let me. Mind! I don't mean to be reproachful either. I don't complain that you design to keep me here. But you do it, you do it." (IV,6)

Rather than have to commit himself to an emotion, he blames her. Her look "troubled his better nature." Unfortunately his selfishness is still stronger than his "better nature": "He looked at her with a real sentiment of remorseful tenderness and pity. It was not strong enough to impel him to sacrifice himself and spare her, but it was a strong emotion"(IV,6). He explains to her how he is bewildered by his feeling for her: "You don't know how the cursed carelessness, that is over-officious in helping me at every other turning of my life, WON'T help me here"(IV,6). Eugene's love for Lizzie is impeded now by conceit. The realization of his power makes him force her to disclose her love, even though he sees that he should be merciful. When she suggests that he was kind to her "at first," he replies "as if he were a little stung." When she leaves he wonders at his tears, and then protects himself from admitting to his love by calling it ridiculous and lapsing into his usual pretence of carelessness. He sees the lapse as worthless, however, and asserts Lizzie against it, saying that he does feel genuine love, won out of him by her "in spite of myself." But he is still concerned with public opinion, the criticism of society, and thinks that he has to defend himself against it: "I should like to see the fellow...who would undertake





to tell me that this was not a real sentiment on my part...." When he takes refuge in his conceited, careless front, he talks about his father and his reaction if he married Lizzie. Thus when he defines the crisis as "Out of the question to marry her, and out of the question to leave her" he is really attempting to find his genuine nature. The part of his nature that says it is out of the question to marry her is his careless defence, the image he has of himself as ridiculous and without emotion. "You wouldn't marry for some money and some station, because you were frightfully likely to become bored. Are you less frightfully likely to become bored, marrying for no money and no station?"

Eugene's dilemma is caused by the conflict between his accepted image and the new and genuine feeling that has arisen to challenge it.

Eugene has to lose his sense of self in order truly to love Lizzie. Just as she saves him on the river, able to do it because of her total commitment to him, he has to perform a completely selfless act. Thus for Lizzie's sake he refuses to accuse Headstone of the crime. Bella did not completely renounce her pretence until she had to defend John Harmon. Similarly it is Eugene's love for Lizzie that really saves his life. His near drowning is not so much a regeneration as a recognition of his true nature.

Bella and Eugene both win free choice, a quality that Lizzie has always had. She chooses to stay with her father, just as she remembers that she is self-reliant and thus free from any accountability to Headstone. He does not represent a threat to her because she has no awareness of self, whereas Bella and Eugene are constantly threatened because their concern for self makes them fear public opinion. The strength of Bella's denunciation of Boffin lies in the fact that she



did it wholly unasked and without motive. Eugene has to break away from the tyranny of his father and make decisions independently.

Eugene and Bella supply a solution for the problems discussed in Our Mutual Friend. In a world where nothing is what it seems, the only way to stay in society and retain authenticity is through self-awareness. Bella and Eugene are both victims of the deception of society at the beginning of the novel. Bella is led to believe in wealth as an admirable goal. Eugene adopts an attitude of carelessness because he recognizes the falsity of his environment but cannot dissociate himself from it except through a negative, and unrealistic, philosophy of life. Thus they are both isolated because they deny the existence of emotional ties. It is only when they come to realize their own potential for love, and thus innate goodness, that they can see society for what it is, and thus be unaffected by it. Eugene can only truly free himself from Podsnappery when he has something to hold up against it. Thus he and Lizzie continue to live in society. He no longer seeks the solution in a lighthouse.

Corruption of an individual can only occur when that person believes in what is unreal, either in himself or the world. Thus Georgiana is unaffected because she relies on her own emotion and sees through the hypocrisy of her parents. Lizzie remains honest despite her life with a robber of corpses because she recognizes the truth of love. Even Venus is saved by his constant faith in his love for Pleasant Riderhood. In a world where nearly everyone is a deceiver, it is the characters who recognize the truth for what it is who can overcome the isolation of deception and live a meaningful life.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

It is always unwise to theorize about any art, because the explanation lies in the creation itself, but a study of the principles of self-deception as a motivation in character suggests some interesting aspects of Dickens' vision of humanity. The deceiver invariably hides the good side of his nature: it is also his true self, the self that he has always had. The mask behind which he hides is essentially false, the accumulation of fear, other people's wrong influence, or the person's misconception of himself. It is the external self, the distorted and unreal image, that is harmful. Dombey's cruelty, Edith's stubborn self-humiliation and Carker's desire for power are all self-deceptions that result in cruelty for others. Bella discovers that her avarice has harmed Rokesmith; Lizzie suffers because of Eugene's assumed insolence. Because the self-deceiver is always partially aware of his true nature he does not become totally irrational. It is only when the belief in the mask, a belief in unreality, becomes a conviction, that madness results. Thus for Miss Wade and Bradley Headstone the sense of injustice becomes real, and even though Headstone realizes that he is tormenting himself, he cannot free himself from his distorted self-awareness. In a sense Dombey's self-deception places him between Miss Wade and Eugene, Bella and Pip. Injustice is at the root of Miss Wade's deception. But because she has believed in her ill-treatment since childhood it has become the truth for her. This in part explains why Dombey's repressed love for Florence has always been there, as is shown in the first passages of the novel. Dombey is unable to make his distorted sense





of blame a conviction, because the knowledge of his love is always there undermining it. Although he tries to hate Florence because of the love that he does not want to admit, it is still there and it is impossible for him to completely deny it.

The characters are led into self-deception for reasons which are often hard to determine. The hidden side is never the bad side. Unlike ordinary deceivers, who mask evil by hypocrisy, self-deceivers wish to deny their better nature, usually because of egoism. Pip, destined to be a gentleman, cannot admit to loving a blacksmith, but the real reason for his irrational love of Estella cannot be explained, just as Pip himself could not explain it. Similarly Eugene's denial of his love for Lizzie is partly a result of fear, of habit through upbringing, and of conceit. But the essence of Eugene's conflict, that which makes it unique, cannot be defined.

Because the self-deceiver is attempting to deny his capacity for love, he is naturally isolated. Thus the sense of isolation derives from individual character, although in Our Mutual Friend even isolation becomes deceptive. As Twemlow discovers, the Veneering's "friends" are all strangers and there is no communication between them at all, whereas Eugene and Bella deny true communication by setting up conscious barriers.

The paradox of the deceiver's situation is that enlightenment brings both awareness of the true self, and at the same moment, denial of self and the ability to love. Miller notes the paradox with reference to Great Expectations: "For Dickens, as for Kierkegaard, the self can only affirm itself through self-sacrifice. But what was for Kierkegaard the relation of man to God becomes in Dickens the relation of man to man.



No character in Dickens finally achieves authentic selfhood by establishing direct relation to God. Only the mutually self-denying, self-creating relationship of love succeeds, whereas the active assertion of will and the passive hope of great expectations both fail."<sup>1</sup>

The essence of self-deception is that the person believes in a false idea of himself, fostered by a misrepresentation of himself and his situation. Thus the awakening from self-deception means the knowledge of what is true, and at the same time, good. Thus Dickens' characters can emerge from the mad world of Little Dorrit and the false world of Our Mutual Friend with a knowledge of reality and a mutual understanding that makes isolation another aspect of what is basically false. Because the evil in man and society proves to be deceptive, Dickens' final assertion is that what is true is also good.



## FOOTNOTES

### Chapter I

- <sup>1</sup>Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels, 84.
- <sup>2</sup>Van Ghent, "On Great Expectations", 127.
- <sup>3</sup>Pritchett, The Living Novel, 88.
- <sup>4</sup>Vande Kieft, "Patterns of Communication in Great Expectations", 325-334.
- <sup>5</sup>Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels, 123.
- <sup>6</sup>Hardy, "The Change of Heart in Dickens' Novels", 42.
- <sup>7</sup>Ibid., 47.
- <sup>8</sup>Needham, "The Undisciplined Heart of David Copperfield", 100.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid., 106.
- <sup>10</sup>Brown, "David Copperfield", 651-666.
- <sup>11</sup>Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels, 265.
- <sup>12</sup>Mordecai Marcus, "The Pattern of Self-Alienation in Great Expectations", 9.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid., 10.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup>Hardy, "The Change of Heart in Dickens' Novels", 52.
- <sup>16</sup>Dickens, Little Dorrit, LVII.
- <sup>17</sup>Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 30-31.

### Chapter II

- <sup>1</sup>Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens, VI, 2.
- <sup>2</sup>Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties, 163.
- <sup>3</sup>Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, II, 630.





- <sup>4</sup>Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties, 171.
- <sup>5</sup>Steven Marcus, Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey, 351.
- <sup>6</sup>Tillotson, "A Lost Sentence in Dombey and Son", 81-82.
- <sup>7</sup>Bland, "The Lost Sentence in Dombey and Son Once More", 142-143.
- <sup>8</sup>Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels, 147.
- <sup>9</sup>Miller, "Our Mutual Friend", 173.
- <sup>10</sup>Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels, 146.

### Chapter III

- <sup>1</sup>Morse, "Our Mutual Friend", 207.
- <sup>2</sup>Miyoshi, "Resolution of Identity in Our Mutual Friend", 6.
- <sup>3</sup>Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges", 78.
- <sup>4</sup>Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels, 308.
- <sup>5</sup>Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 29.
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid., 32.
- <sup>7</sup>Hardy, "The Change of Heart in Dickens' Novels", 53.
- <sup>8</sup>Miller, "Our Mutual Friend", 177.

### Chapter IV

- <sup>1</sup>Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels, 276.



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